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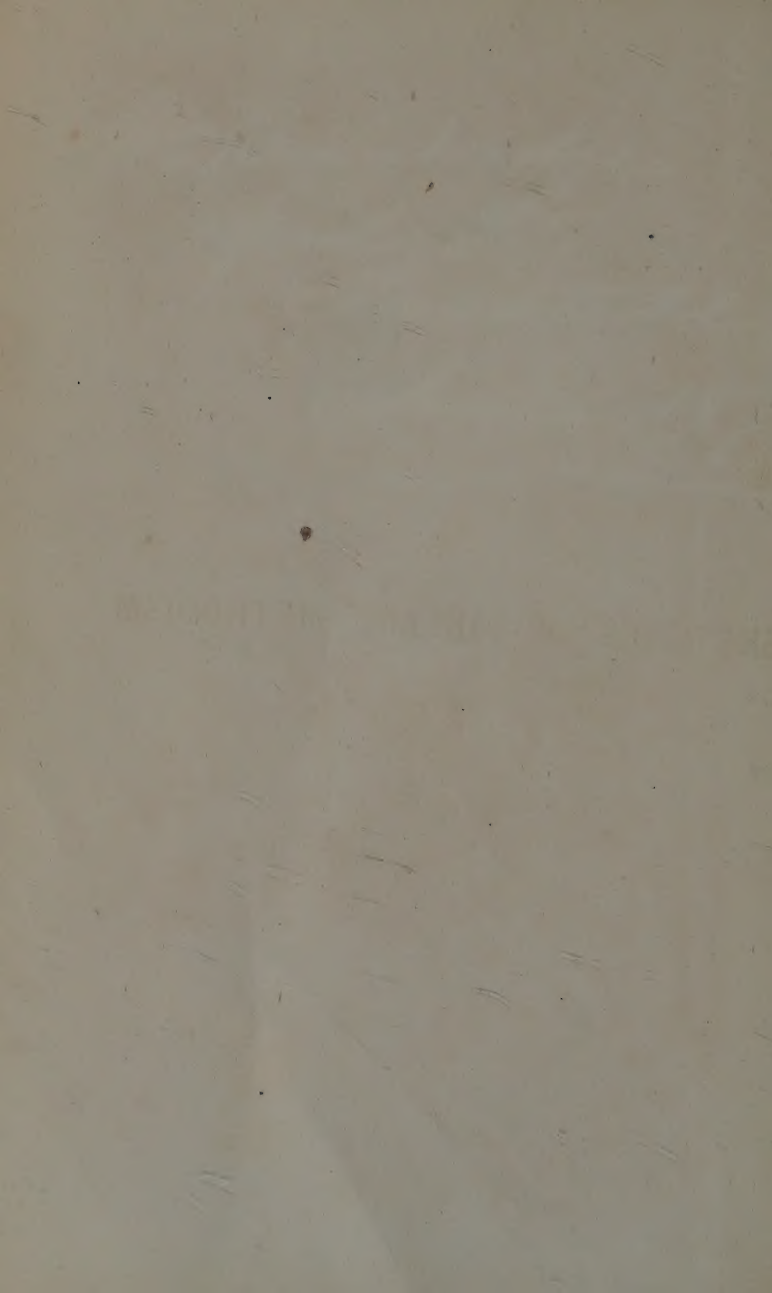
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SKETCHES OF VILLAGE METHODISM.



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1877

# SKETCHES OF VILLAGE METHODISM.

BY  
*JOHN COLWELL,*  
WESLEYAN MINISTER.

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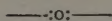
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## PREFACE.



A NUMBER of these sketches have already appeared in print. Some others have been added, and the former revised, and they are now sent forth in book form, at the request of many friends, and in the hope that they may do some little service to the cause of Village Methodism, and bring glory to Christ. Those who may be disposed to criticise them from a literary standpoint, will, perhaps, remember that they were written for publication in a newspaper, and were adapted to that rather than to publication in any permanent form. To alter them, however, would involve an entire recasting, and for this the writer has no time, without neglecting duties which he conceives—rightly or wrongly—to be even more important than book-writing. Nothing brilliant or romantic is to be found in them, but the reader is assured that they are truthful histories; for the accuracy of

the facts the writer can vouch. Very many of the characters referred to are still living—some of them in the prime of life—and for that and other reasons assumed names of persons and places are used.

The writer well knows the trials to which village Methodists are subjected, and the discouragements they feel, and earnestly hopes this little book may be the means of encouraging some of them to be faithful both to Christ and to Methodism; while he trusts it may also lead to increased sympathy with them on the part of their more favoured brethren.

Commending it to the Divine blessing, he now sends it forth to do such work as may be permitted to it.

*Bowdon, April, 1877.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### Introductory.

VILLAGE Methodism ! Thank God for it, says the writer, and many of his readers will devoutly say, Amen. And if "*all* the people" do not say so it will not be because the subject is not worthy of it, but because some of "the people" are not acquainted with the claims it has upon their grateful sympathies. Village Methodism ! Those simple words strike chords of sympathy in many a heart, and send memory, with fond delight, back again into the silent years. What sweet, holy, and thankful recollections many of us have of the farmhouse kitchen, the humble cottage, the barn, or the little chapel that stood by the roadside, on the edge of the common, or under the hill, and where we first received those influences from God that softened our passions, influenced our hearts, made us conscious that we had minds, and brought the light from higher spheres into our simple, unthinking childhood.

"But," says a town acquaintance of to-day, "the chapels were so small and mean, the congregations so poor in every way, the preacher often feeble and always uncultured, the service so inartistic and inelegant, the singing so inharmonious, and the surroundings generally so infelicitous, that it cannot be matter of regret that you have left it and removed to the town." Now, though there were numerous exceptions to the above description, we must confess that often it was true. But,

supposing we have to plead guilty to this, and in some instances more than this, we still look back with devout thankfulness and veneration to these simple, sweet, and homely services. The chapel, it is true, was always unpretending in the matter of architecture, and sometimes scarcely sufficient to keep the congregation warm and dry, and never, therefore, assisted worship by imposing veneration and awe upon the worshippers ; neither did it hinder worship by enticing the congregation to admire the beauty of the carving or painting, or prevent the sermon from being effective by causing the words of the preacher to wander to and fro through the building, and then fall upon the people like the shadowy and uncertain ghosts of their former selves.

The preachers were not all good, or always good. Had they been so they would have presented a remarkable phenomenon, being the only class of preachers that ever were. But what they lacked in education and culture they usually made up in strong common sense and pious feeling, and sometimes by great intelligence and power ; and almost universally they understood the Scriptures and the human heart, and knew, because they were themselves on the road, the way from the city of destruction to the city of the celestials.

That the services were inartistic and inelegant we suppose we must admit. The same thing, however, might have been said of some held of old—of those of the Puritans, for example. The services attended by the Cavaliers were as elegant and well-appointed as they could well be, but they moulded the characters of Charles II., Strafford, and Laud ; while the rude and inartistic services of the Roundheads produced such men as Cromwell and his Ironsides—men not altogether inconsiderable in the world's history. It is not always the case

that the most finished services produce the most finished men. The singing certainly was not always such as a well-trained ear might desire ; indeed, we are quite willing to admit that it was not one-fiftieth part so correct, nor one-hundredth part so cold and lifeless as it is in some Methodist chapels to-day. But if not always with the understanding, it was always with the heart ; it was sincere, and therefore acceptable to God ; it was earnest and hearty, and therefore a blessing to men. And the congregations were not so poor in any sense as some might be disposed to think. Though the village squire was not often to be seen in them, some of the farmers and small tradesmen often were, and as to numbers the chapels were generally well attended, if not full, in the days of which we write. And the services, though simple, were calculated for usefulness, and did a good work. They had the drawbacks, but at the same time the advantages, which attend all things new and strange. There was little organisation about them, but much power. They were not often devoid of "go;" they never lacked heart, and would furnish rich funds of incident and anecdote for the historian,—which suggests the asking of a question which has often occurred to us, viz., Could no fitting pen be found to write a history of village Methodism ? Of course it could only be done by selecting a few villages, with good judgment, and making them types or representatives of the varied history and success Methodism has had in villages generally. But this, we venture to think, might be done with profit. For, if we are not mistaken, the historian would find in village Methodism a soil as rich in strange incident, in anecdote illustrating character, in the interpositions of Divine Providence, and in the displays of saving grace as is to be found in any part of the history of the



Christian Church—less startling, perhaps, than the history of the early Christians or the Scottish Covenanters, but none the less real or interesting. If such a historian should ever be found, he would find it almost impossible to overstate one aspect of the work; indeed, we think his difficulty would be to state it with sufficient strength and clearness—viz., the *immense* power for good that village Methodism has been.

Its *indirect* benefits have been very great. All good movements have a dual effect, a twofold power. They carve out a channel of blessing all their own, and they excite movement among the springs that gave them birth from which other streams also run. In this way Christianity reacted upon Judaism, and Protestantism upon Romanism. But, taking into account the relative size and importance of the movements, we think no religious movement ever reacted upon other forms of religious life so largely and beneficially as Methodism has upon the religious life of these realms, and especially upon that of the Established Church. For what was the state of things in the Church of England before the "Methodist Revival?" And what is it to-day? Not all we could desire, perhaps, in many ways, but what an immense difference there is between the state of things in 1777 and 1877! And we venture to say that, under God, Methodism has contributed more largely to this altered state of things than any other influence. For the Methodist revival had its beginning in the State Church, and mainly, if not entirely, formed the Evangelical party therein. But our business now is more directly with the influence of Methodism proper. And how great has that been! Churchmen are subject to the same influences as ordinary human beings, and active and popular Methodist "causes" scattered

up and down the villages of the country have had the inevitable effect of rousing the rector and the curate to bestir themselves, and, if not to look after the sheep that were homeless, at least to look after those that were being gathered into other folds. Zeal has, in many instances, proved contagious ; the religious light from the village chapel has streamed through the church windows ; the warmth from the "meeting-house" has spread to the more stately edifice, and preaching, singing, service, minister, and congregation have been greatly benefited thereby. Proofs of this are too numerous and patent to need quotation, but one or two facts that may serve as illustrations will be given in the course of these sketches.

And, further, be it remembered that Methodism has reacted upon the religious life of the land in the best way. We *think* it has improved doctrine. By its constant proclamation of a free and full salvation, it has softened the harshness of some creeds, if it has not removed their objectionable points, and it has made the doctrine of universal redemption much more universally believed, and enabled it to find its way into many pulpits where it had hitherto been unknown. And we are *sure* it has improved life. And though doctrine be important, what is it as compared with the life ? Now, it is certain that the most striking thing about village Methodism is, or was, its life. No one would be struck with the beauty of the service in any "histrionic" sense, but its life, heart, and power would be manifest to all. And as this would be the most contagious part of it, and the part which would excite least prejudice, it would most readily communicate itself, and be most productive of good. And if it is scarcely possible to over-estimate the indirect benefits of village Methodism,

how shall we describe its *direct* benefits? We cannot do so. But we may suggest one or two things that may assist our readers in forming some conceptions of their own.

It has secured in every village where it has been established *a constant and distinct utterance of Gospel truth*. Whatever changes may have been taking place elsewhere, either in ritual or doctrine, or, as has sometimes, unhappily, been the case, in the moral character of the pastor of the village as by law appointed, the pulpit of the village chapel has given no "uncertain sound." If the villagers would not hear, still they might do so if they would, and surely it was no small benefit that in all changes of ecclesiastical weather there was one humble place in which the cross was ever exalted, even though it might be in simplicity. The writer is well acquainted with a village where the fluctuations in the congregations at the Methodist chapel have been constant. The general feeling of the village has always been prejudicial to Methodism, but so many changes have taken place in the pastorate of the village church, and some of them have been so distasteful either in doctrine or ritual to the villagers, that they have availed themselves of the more Protestant service and Scriptural teaching of the Methodist chapel, which has at once become full, while in the event of another and more agreeable change, it has again become partially empty. But even in this most discouraging sphere Methodism has effected great good.

It has *fed the town societies and congregations* with large numbers of members and worshippers, and produced a *far larger proportion* of eminent ministers and laymen than any other part of the Methodist field. This

has been true from the beginning, and is true still. The writer was struck a few days since, in looking over a list of the Presidents of the Conference, by noticing that in fourteen consecutive years no less than *nine* Presidents had sprung from village Methodism, and if his conjectures are correct, one or two of the remaining five did the same. A recent writer has stated that the most prominent merchants, barristers, medical men, and others of weight and influence in our great cities have come from the villages. There is something in the atmosphere and surroundings of country villages, and in the free and self-dependent life that young people must live in them, which peculiarly fits them to make their way. Body and mind enter into the conflict of life full of freshness and vigour, and well braced for the struggle. Surely that vein which has been so productive ought to be well worked.

And village Methodism has blessed the villages of old England *with multitudes of holy and useful lives*, and peopled heaven with multitudes of happy saints. "The Dairyman's Daughter" was a Methodist; so was the "Shepherd of Salisbury Plain"—and what was better, they were not alone; they were only types of hundreds of thousands like them whose lives have been unchronicled on earth, though their names have been "written in heaven." Was Isaac Ashford, the godly peasant, so beautifully described by the poet Crabbe, a Methodist? We rather suspect that at one time in his life he was. Be that as it may, he was a good picture of many Methodists we have known in the villages of the land, to our own great joy and benefit. And though many of these now sleep, alas! among "the rude forefathers of the hamlet," in graves that are unnoticed and unknown, they did not go down to them

either "unwept" or "unhonoured," though, unlike Isaac Ashford, they remain "unsung."

We hope none of our friends will think we claim too much for village Methodism. We know it has, and has had, its imperfections, and these neither few nor small. But despite these, we love it, and confess to an intense desire to see it prosperous. If so, it must be well worked ; and if it is to be well worked, the Methodist people must see its great importance, and take an interest in its well-being. As a contribution, however humble, to this most desirable end, we offer these sketches.

## CHAPTER II.

### Fairview.

WHY do we commence these sketches of village Methodism with this little village? For many reasons, some of which we will not tell the reader. Let him be satisfied that *we* know them, and think them very weighty: possibly he might not. But one reason he shall know—viz., this, that Methodism has been less successful in Fairview than it has in the great majority of the villages where it has been established. And as our aim is to show the good effects of village Methodism, and consequently the desirableness of maintaining and strengthening it, we will begin by showing that where it has been *least successful* and *most discouraging*, it has paid ten thousand times over for all the pains taken with it. And thus, perhaps, when the shrewd Methodist merchants of the cities see that it will “pay,” they will stand by it even more nobly in the future than they have done in the past, and some poor Methodist toilers in villages where the cause is “low” may be encouraged to take heart.

Fairview was beautifully situated. It lay in one of the most fertile and pleasant vales that ever echoed to the reaper’s song, or smiled in “living green,” mingled with a thousand other colours, when bathed in the joyous spring sunshine. Four or five miles away there stood a noble range of hills, which stretched in a long chain

on either hand, and bounded the valley on one side. Though some distance from the village, yet within easy walking distance, there was a broad and beautiful river, which seemed to connect the villagers with the ocean, not only because its waters ran thither, but because the tides of the salt sea came up it in great volume and force. And then away beyond the river there was a blue range of hills, which formed the horizon, and bounded the valley upon its other side. Through the centre of the village there ran the old road which had been made by the Romans, and which had often, no doubt, echoed to the tramp of their legions. This was the great "London road," which led "over the hills and far away" to London, and thence to anywhere else you might care to go in the "wide, wide world." And if the villager walked upon this road for about three miles (turning his back upon London), he would come to the neighbouring city, which was first a British settlement, then a Roman encampment, and always a place of importance in the history of this country. Parliaments have been held in it; great battles during the Wars of the Roses and the struggles of the Commonwealth have been fought in it and near it; it has a fine and ancient cathedral, under which the dust of knights and lords, bishops, and even kings sleep, and is, in all respects, a "faire citie." For many generations it was noted for its many churches. Within the radius of a quarter of a mile of the cathedral you might have counted no less than *fifteen* church spires, and hence arose the proverb, which was often used in reference to the city, "As true as God's in Faircester."

And yet, perhaps, there never were a number of villages worse served with the ordinances of religion, or worse supplied with men to administer them, than those which lay almost beneath the shadow of this cathedral



and these fifteen church spires. The writer could a "tale unfold" in reference to many of them, but as Fairview was a fair sample, let us leave the others, and take that. Fairview was a hamlet, and as one church had to serve for the parish and the hamlet, it was between two and three miles from the village of Fairview. In the days of which we speak there was service there once on the Lord's Day, and not at all during the week, so that, supposing the villagers used all the means provided for them, they could scarcely be in danger of a religious surfeit. We will say as little about Mr. Careless, the clergyman, as possible, as we shall meet him again in these sketches. Suffice it for the present that he was gentlemanly, in the vulgar acceptance of the term, that he did "duty" once a week with a very fair degree of regularity, and allowed his parishioners to look after themselves for both worlds. As a consequence, many of the people never went to church, those who did were ignorant of Christian life, and had they seen a man who professed to be a Christian, would have called him a Methodist (whatever that might mean), and have persecuted or shunned him accordingly.

But the villagers were to be blessed, though they neither desired nor sought a blessing, for in the year 18— a young Methodist tradesman, named Fairchild, who had just married a Methodist wife, was led by the providence of God to settle in their midst. For a time this young couple were content to walk to the Methodist services in the neighbouring city, and occasionally to visit the parish church on Sunday morning. But Mr. Fairchild owed his religion to the influences of village Methodism, and knew therefore that its simple services would be a great blessing to the neglected villagers of Fairview. (Occasional Methodist services had been held

in the village, but had been discontinued.) So, after consultation with the "friends" and the "superintendent," his own house was opened for Sunday evening and occasional week evening services, and Fairview was placed upon the "plan" of the Faircester Circuit, where it still remains. Very primitive those services were. The preacher stood in one corner of the large kitchen, with a table surmounted by a desk before him, on which were placed the two old-fashioned upright silver candlesticks which on other occasions graced the mantelpiece; and, as these candlesticks were special, they were supplied with candles of a larger size than those in ordinary use in the Fairchild household. In addition to these, which were only supplied to the preacher, there were three or four "dips," of sixteen or eighteen to the pound, carefully distributed in other parts of the room, but these were always extinguished after the second singing, so that they might not be "wasted" during the sermon. So that there was not very much artificial light during preaching. This proved to be rather dangerous, however, for on one occasion, when no less a person than the "super" was preaching, he paused in his discourse in order to improve his light, and applying the snuffers to the candle upon his right hand snuffed it out. With a "hem," he applied them to the candle upon his left, and snuffed that out likewise. So, with a prolonged "he-e-m," he had to wait until the candles were relit, when he went on with his sermon in no wise disturbed by what had happened.

These services were mainly, if not exclusively, conducted by local preachers. The "travelling preachers" were too much engaged in more important places to be able to pay very much attention to Fairview; they were comets that moved in higher spheres, and did not often

pass through the orbits of these simple villagers, but when they did they were treated like comets—viz., with great wonder and admiration. Upon the local preachers, however, fell the burden of the work, and nobly, well, and faithfully they did it. All of them were respectable, but most of them were poor, and their only means of reaching their appointments was by walking. But who ever heard them complain? They came with garments travel-soiled and sometimes threadbare, but always neat and clean; with faces lit up by kindly smiles, and hearts made warm and pure with the love of God and man. They did their work with heartiness, intelligence, and good effect, and, after a chat over the supper, and a prayer after it, went home weary but light-hearted. Some two or three there were who drove their own conveyances, and then there was quite a commotion, after the service, in lighting gig-lamps, “putting the horse in,” and starting the preacher safely out into the night. Heaven’s choicest blessings be upon the memories of these men! Many a familiar face among such men as these passes before us while we write, and we could almost wish it were right to pray for the dead, in order that we might relieve ourselves by asking God to bless them. But while we may not do that, we may be the better by remembering that “such as these have lived and died.” And in Fairview they did not labour in vain. The congregations for a number of years were very good, often large, several having to stand about the doors. The villagers were attracted, and in one instance the wife of a military captain borrowed a cloak from an old woman, and, otherwise disguising herself, attended the services. A “class” was formed, the village children were gathered into Sunday-school, hearts were purified, homes were blessed, and good was done.

Among others, an old soldier, named Gadd, came out of mere curiosity. He had fought in the Peninsular War and in the Battle of Waterloo. When fighting at Waterloo he was annoyed in some way by one of his comrades, and turning round, he cursed him, and wished him in hell. A moment afterwards a ball struck this poor fellow dead. Gadd, however, escaped unhurt, and the lion that could not be tamed by anything else, was brought to his right mind by the humble Methodist services of the village in which he settled after his wanderings. He was truly saved, lived a life of consistent piety for a few years, and then died "rejoicing in hope."

The Rev. Mr. Careless was preceded in the "cure of souls" at Fairview by a young clergyman, who acted as curate for the then incumbent, who resided at a distance. This young man was earnest and devoted, and came between the old incumbent, Mr. Easyman, and his successor, Mr. Careless, like a gleam of sunshine between two dark clouds. He held service in the church twice a day, organised a choir, visited the people, and for the brief space he laboured in Fairview did much good. The most decided case of benefit was that of a young man named Steadiman, who became impressed with good, and ultimately converted. One Sabbath afternoon, as he walked across the beautiful country on his way to church, he was suddenly seized with thoughts of the dread solemnities of coming judgment. Tremblingly he continued his walk to the church, where he found the service commenced; but, unable to contain himself, he knelt down in the pew to pray. Very soon, to use his own words, "he found what he wanted," and for a while was happy. But, owing to his mingling with bad company, or to the want of such oversight as the Methodists get in the class-meeting, or to the fact that the young

curate soon left, and the parish relapsed into its former stagnant, one-service-a-week condition, young Steadiman falsified his name and fell back. So soon, however, as the Methodist services were established he went to them, regained his lost peace, joined the society, and has rendered many years of consistent and devoted service to Methodism in Fairview. He still lives to labour for it, and may he long do so; and before he is called to heaven may he see a gracious revival of religion and many souls saved in his native village.

Thus the little cause went on and prospered. The villagers were roused by it; by these humble services they were reminded of the existence of God, that He was a living, real Being, who cared for His creatures; that there was such a thing as Christianity in the world, and that it had not lost its power to bless and save mankind.

Of course there was persecution, though it was never of a very active kind. Better, we had almost said, if it had been; for, if the people had heartily persecuted the Methodists at first, they might have taken to them as heartily afterwards. But they did neither; their persecution of Methodism at its introduction into the village was like their acceptance of it to-day, viz., languid and uncertain. Their persecution was confined to words. Soon after Mr. Fairchild opened his house for preaching, he built a shop for business purposes, and as the villagers passed it, they would shout, "That's the place to dip 'em in." And as the Methodists passed up and down the village, the "hobble-de-hoys" and idlers of the place shouted after them "Maumonites" (perhaps a corruption of Mormonites), and other derisive epithets.

But the services went on, and in due course a handsome stone-built chapel was erected. For this the village

was largely indebted to a good Methodist rightly named Goodman, who resided in the neighbouring city. He had been successful in business without losing his religion, and, after contributing largely to the erection of the chapel at Fairview, came himself to reside in the village. Though well advanced in years, and in most easy circumstances, he might be seen in all weathers making his way to the seven o'clock Sunday morning prayer-meeting, and to all other services, both Sunday and week-day. He was not, as many, alas ! one who attended the services, circumstances, weather, and inclination permitting. In the services of God's house, the administration of charity, and all other good works, his "due feet failed not," and in Fairview his memory is green. May the dust lie lightly upon him, and may we be counted worthy to be near him in Paradise.

Soon after the chapel was opened it attracted the attention of canons and others connected with the cathedral in Faircester, and they began to perceive that the village needed a church. So land was procured, and a church and schools were built. The Methodist leader happened to be acting as steward for the gentleman who gave the land, and had therefore to meet two canons from the cathedral, and other clergymen, when the ground was selected and measured out. These gentlemen, however, were in blissful ignorance of the fact that they had the ring-leader of the Methodists among them, and they expressed themselves without reserve. Among other things, Canon Consequence remarked to the donor of the land : "The fact is, these meetings have built a meeting-house here, and now we are *determined* to have a church." So the church was built, and opened with such a flutter of vestments and murmuring of consecrations and prayers as Fairview had never seen. From which it ap-

pears that whatever good the church has effected in Fairview is due to Methodism.

Still the chapel-doors are open, regular services are held, and much good is being accomplished. One minister, several local preachers and class-leaders, many sober, religious, and good citizens, and some who are living godly and useful lives "beyond the seas," attribute their all of good to Methodism in this little village ; and in the great day she shall not be the least in our spiritual Israel, for the Highest Himself will declare that many "were born in her."



## CHAPTER III.

### "Old John."

NOT that he was always old. He was "born a babe," and for some time after that he was young, we suppose ; but from thirty to nearly eighty he was "Old John." He was never, perhaps, as young as some men are, and long before middle life he had settled into steady, old-fashioned, almost ancient ways of talking, thinking, walking, and doing everything else : hence, the villagers called him "Old John." In what year of our Lord he was born or died, or in what village or county he passed his days, now matters not. The kind reader will allow us to draw a veil over his name and place, and be satisfied when we assure him that he really did live, and that he owed his goodness and usefulness on earth and his hopes of heaven, under God, to village Methodism.

Indeed, "Old John" would have fared badly in his young days had it not been for it, for in those remote times there was but one service a week held in his parish church, and that of a most meagre and ineffective character. He well remembered the clergyman, "old Mr. Emerson." He was a good-natured, easy old gentleman, nearly eighty years of age. He lived four or five miles away, in the city, and only came to the parish once a week—viz., on the Sunday afternoon, to preach—except on rare occasions, to conduct a funeral that could not be kept till Sunday. He then came mounted on an old pony that could not have been as old, but that looked

even more ancient than himself. He was "mostly" late in arriving, and, as the church stood upon a hill, and from one of its doors you could get an extensive view of the valley through which he had to ride, the villagers gathered around this door to watch his approach, while the lads (including "Old John") amused themselves by playing in the churchyard. Sometimes this late arrival of the minister led to consequences that ought to have been deplored, but which, we fear, very few of the villagers were pious enough to regret. For in the short days of winter, darkness came down upon the congregation before the service was more than half completed, and when the old clergyman had only just begun his sermon. What was to be done? The villagers would as soon have thought of setting fire to the church as of lighting it up, and the clergyman could more easily have stood upon his head in the pulpit than have delivered his sermon otherwise than by reading it; so there was nothing for it but to tell the people it was so dark that the service must close, and they must have the sermon another time. The living was certainly a poor one, and Mr. Emerson no doubt honestly thought he earned all he received. Perhaps he did; but although this logic satisfied him, it did not add anything to the efficiency of his few and feeble services, and certainly did not lead to any spiritual results—for although the fact that the living was poor and the services ditto might have been a very harmonious one, and might have delighted a logician, it did not furnish spiritual aliment for the unfortunate villagers. Happily for them, however, the Methodists were in their midst. About the date of "Old John's" birth, they entered his native village, and both his parents attended their services. The

father, however, soon wearied. He was a thrasher, and worked with another man who was of the same craft, old Will Salcomb. Old Will was rather smart, and thought himself clever and learned to the last degree. Perhaps the extent of his book-learning would be that he could (as the villagers put it) "just tell the difference between a great A and a bull's foot." He was a stout defender of "Church and King," and a "good hater" of all religion, and had in some way got the idea into his ignorant pate that the Methodists were enemies of the Church. So when he found that his companion went to hear the Methodist preachers, he opened his small batteries of ridicule upon him day by day, against which "Old John's" father was not proof. His mother, however, spite all opposition, very regularly attended the Methodist services week-days as well as Sundays, leading her little boy with her. By the way, we wonder how many good and great men there are, or have been in this world, who have not been made so, in whole or in part, by their mothers! How the image of this mother and her little boy rises before us as we write! Working in the fields most of the week, during a large portion of the year at least, having the care of her home and family besides, and fighting a constant battle with poverty, she has, nevertheless, caught an echo of her Master's voice, and now takes her little boy, that he, too, may listen to its words and be blessed. Her husband has deserted her in this most important work of training the children for goodness, because he is too much of a coward to resist the sport of an ignorant scoffer. But, argues the mother, that is the greater reason why I should do all the more. So she faithfully does her duty, and whatever of heaven and blessedness there is in that home, the mother brings it. In many of the villages of Old England there are

such mothers numbered in our Methodist Israel. Poor but decent, unlearned but godly, not richly clad but always cleanly, how refreshing it is to think of their sun-burnt but honest and wholesome faces, and to remember how blessedly they are influencing their children for God, despite the difficulties of their lot. May God bless them and give them more rest in heaven than they are ever likely to have on earth ! .

"Old John's" mother died early, but not before the seeds sown in the heart of her son had begun to take root. He never went far into sin—never was in any sense of the word wild. Consequently, his conversion was less marked than in some cases, but it was thorough, and proved itself so by the genuine, consistent, and unflagging goodness of a long life.

"Old John" could never tell exactly when he passed into the liberty of God's children, and he would often say, "That's not a thing to trouble about. If I was a goin' up the 'ill yonder, all I shud want to do 'ud be to get to the top on 'im, and when I once was a' top, I shud never bother myself much in tryin' to find out wur I'd put my vit and just how I'd got thur ; I shud say, 'Well, I *be* here sure enough, and that'll do.' And so, if I do'ant know just when God made me a child o' His, I do know He *have* done it, and I be quite content." And, of course, as John did not know exactly when he was led to the blessing of salvation, he did not know who led him to it. He loved all the preachers, and would hardly admit that he liked one better than another. He used to say, "I've all'as gone expectin' good, and I've never miss'd findin' it once for the last forty year ; but tho' all the prachers is good, I get's more good under sum on 'em than others." But of course some of the preachers, both itinerant and lay, were spoken of with

special affection, and many an incident in connection with them was often repeated. On one occasion the two "travelling preachers" on the "circuit" were very different in their appearance and habits. One was stately, tall, dignified, and handsome; the other was small and insignificant. The one was robust and healthy; the other weak and feeble. The one used to preach grand and masterly sermons, and was very fond of taking his texts from the prophecies, especially those hard to be understood, while the other took simple texts and preached earnest sermons. Both were much respected and very popular. Sometimes these "travellers" paid visits to the village in which "Old John" lived, and it fell to his lot to conduct them across the lanes and fields to and from the village. One Sunday afternoon he went to bring the "tall 'un" from a village some miles away where he had preached twice, to his own village, to preach in the evening. The walk was long, the roads and fields in such a condition as to furnish a practical comment upon the words, "I was in the miry clay;" the rain descended and the winds roared, and the "tall 'un" did not like it. Every now and again he would slip down and measure his length in the mire, and always, of course, in the most dirty places. When he had regained his feet, he would say, "This is bad management; I ought not to have to make such journeys as this." (Which was quite true, as there were two or three Methodist farmers in the village whose horses were standing idle. The last thing about a farmer that gets converted is his horse.)

On another occasion the "little 'un" made a mistake in his appointment, and one dreadfully dark and rainy night appeared at "Old John's" door, when he should have been at another village. "Is there *nobody* to

preach to, then, after such a walk?" said the minister. He was informed of his error, and strongly urged to go home, as the night was so bad. But no, the little congregation in the other village must not be disappointed, however few they might be. So "Old John" brought out his lantern, and started to guide the "little 'un" to his work. If it ever rained and blew, and the roads were bad, and heaven and earth seemed mingled in one mass of darkness and tempest, it was that night; but nothing could daunt the big spirit in the little body. When he fell down, which often happened, he was up again almost before he was down, but not to complain, only to say, "What a mercy the mire is so soft! One can fall down twenty times without breaking a bone or otherwise hurting oneself; praise God things are no worse!" The appointment was gone through, and "Old John" saw the "little 'un" safely to the "lamps;" then he trudged through rain, wind, and darkness home again, and said to his wife, "Both on 'em love's God and thur work, but they be mighty different to be sure; pluck is a'most everythin' in gettin' a man through this world—bigness be nowhur by the side o' pluck!"

"Old John" worked hard, and literally earned his bread by the sweat of his brow. We cannot claim for him that his religion lifted him up into a higher sphere socially or intellectually, at least to any remarkable extent. In the lowly position in which he was born, he lived and died—viz., that of an agricultural labourer. But through the influence of the Methodism that visited his native village, his life was made immeasurably sweeter, purer, and nobler than it would otherwise have been, and differed very substantially from lives around it that had not been influenced in the same way. John's



thoughts were purer than the thoughts of his neighbours, his heart was larger and warmer, and his horizon much higher than theirs ; his home was sweeter, and there was a sunshine and gladness in his life, and an entire new world within him, to which they were strangers. His religion became the "open sesame" to an inheritance of goodness and blessing which would otherwise have been closed against him, and of the very existence of which he would not so much as have dreamed. It made him a better mower, a better reaper, and a better man, and many of the fields around his cottage could bear witness, not only to the fact that he prayed and talked with God while he worked, but that he tilled them more thoroughly because he did so. And these are benefits which Methodism has conferred upon untold thousands, and yet they are benefits often overlooked. We take the cases wherein it has lifted a country lad into an intellectual, commercial, or spiritual giant, and clap our hands with astonished gladness, and say, "Look here." But these cases must always, in the nature of things, be exceptional, while the others form the common rule. How forcefully and beautifully has it been said : "The world hardly attaches any significance to any life except those of its heroes and benefactors, its mighty intellects, or its splendid conquerors. But these are, and must ever be, the few. One raindrop of myriads falling on moor, or desert, or mountain—one snowflake out of myriads melting into the immeasurable sea—is, and must be, for most men the symbol of their ordinary lives. They die, and barely have they died, when they are forgotten, and thus of almost every man that ever lived, it may be said :

His place in all the pomp that fills  
The circuit of the summer hills,  
Is that his grave is green."



The greatest work, then, is that which makes these individual raindrops pure, and utilises them for their own and the general good ; and this is what Methodism has done in our villages. Its influence upon "Old John" was a sample of this kind of good.

"Old John" lent himself to such work as he could do with a will. He was rather a noted singer, though we must confess that there was a little more of the nasal sound in his singing than was desirable, and that he sometimes introduced turns and slurs into the tunes which would have shocked the composers of them ; still, he sang with heart and voice, and when he led a chapelful of people on a Sunday evening, he and they together produced such hearty and inspiring song as we trust we may hear in heaven.

He taught in the Sunday-school, but certainly not with any "wisdom of this world," in any sense of the word. He was never put in charge of anything higher than the first Testament class, except in case of emergency. Sometimes, however, such an emergency did occur, and on one such occasion he got out of his depth. A stupid lad was stumbling away at the name of a heathen king, and in order to end his difficulty, spelt it slowly, S-e-n-n-a-c-h-e-r-i-b. "Why," said John, "you should know that without spelling—it's Snatchcrab." Living in an apple country, both teacher and scholar would consider that an intelligent definition. "Then why make such a man a teacher?" exclaims our intelligent Sunday-school superintendent of to-day. For many reasons, and sufficient ones, too. First, as a matter of necessity. Nobody cared for the children save the Methodists, and as there was no other Sabbath-school, they had all the children of the village under their care. And though several godly and devoted men and women came

from the distant city Sunday after Sunday, through rain and shine, leaving the comforts of home the only day of the whole week they had any opportunity of enjoying them, teaching morning and afternoon, and eating their morsel between school-hours in the school alone, still there was a deficiency which had to be made up from the villagers, and "Old John" was among the number. And, in the second place, because he was a good teacher, if it be true—and we are sure it is—that "it is not the voice of erudition, but, as the old Greek thinker says, the voice of inspiration, which, uttering things simple, and unperfumed, and unadorned, reacheth through myriads of years"—"Old John" was inspired in the best, though not in the highest sense: he had the "wisdom of a pure heart, an enlightened eye, and a blameless life"—and such wisdom he taught in the Sunday-school.

But we must bid our old friend good-bye. We shall never look upon his old-fashioned dress, so scrupulously neat and clean, his countenance, handsome with the glow of honesty, innocence, and health, hear his simple wisdom, or admire his loving goodness any more: these are among the things that have been, and their only record is on the pages of memory, but, if God will, we shall see him and hear him again in the choirs and hallelujahs of the blessed.

## CHAPTER IV.

### Overtown.

IT was not, however, a town, but a village; or rather a large parish, containing scattered farm-houses and cottages, with here and there a cluster of houses, after the manner of the great majority of the parishes of Old England. It was a very ancient place, having been the seat of a monastery for many centuries; but at the time of the Reformation the church that used to echo the sleepy chants of the old monks became the church of the parish under Protestant rule; the old storehouse became a parish barn, and the outbuildings were converted to farm uses, while the greater part of the monastery itself was pulled down. To say that the monks had chosen it for their home is quite equivalent to saying that it was a lovely spot, for whenever did they settle in any places but the fairest and the best? The villagers, however, reaped the benefit of having to walk to church through most beautiful scenery, and finding their journey terminate in one of the most perfect scenes of quiet and peaceful beauty it has been our happiness to see. But there was the serious drawback, that the church was two miles from the inhabited parts of the parish, and four miles from the other extreme of it. It seemed as though the fathers of the place had wished to give religion a good home at a distance from business care and every-day life, and so had planted it in a quiet spot, where it would not disturb them, and where they might visit

it when so disposed ; though no doubt the truth was that the villages had grown up in later years in other parts of the parish than that in which the church had been built.

Whether the "squire" of Overtown was a Roman Catholic at the time of the Reformation, and his descendants always continued so, or whether some Roman Catholic gentleman came into the estates by inheritance or purchase in later years, we cannot say, but at the time this history begins the great family of the place belonged to that faith. As a consequence Protestantism was sometimes held in check, if not subjected to something like persecution. The mode of its treatment seemed to be decided by two things. First, the character of the squire. If he happened to be strict, devout, and attached to his creed, so much the worse for the interests of Protestants ; but if, on the other hand, he was devoted to hunting, fishing, and coursing, and allowed things to come and go as they might so long as his enjoyments were not interfered with, Protestants and Protestantism were left alone. Secondly, to the conduct and character of the clergyman. If he were an energetic and devoted man, the wrath of the squire waxed hot, and could only be cooled by oppressing the villagers ; but if he were an easy, "come-day, go-day" soul, who baptised the babes and buried the dead, and left the others to shift for themselves, the squire was usually quiet.

But at the time at which we write there was both a devout squire and a devoted clergyman, and, in modern phrase, they soon "collided." The squire erected a Roman Catholic chapel as close to the church wall as he could possibly get it, and so near to the church that if the services were held at the same time they must

seriously have interfered with each other's comfort and efficiency. Shortly afterwards he built a nunnery, which was speedily inhabited, filled, as one might say, with the requisite machinery, and got into full operation. The villagers felt greatly scandalised at this, and the impression made upon them may be gathered in the traditions that yet linger "anent" this business. One old man tells us how, when he was a lad, a poor runaway nun came to his father's house one dark and stormy night, and begged, "for the love of God," to be taken in and hidden for a while, till the search was over and she might escape. But his father was afraid of "the squire," and the poor creature had to wander away into the darkness, no man knew whither. Another old man tells us that, when quite young, he and an older man worked in the nunnery garden, and that his companion got into conversation with one of the sisters or servants about the place, who did her best to make him a Romanist. After a while a little image was brought out and shown to assist in the work, but our shrewd villager, looking somewhat closely at it, and perceiving it to be worm-eaten, exclaimed, "A pretty thing that is to make a god on, and can't keep the grubs out of his own body." What wonder that such an irreverent fellow was ever after left to himself!

But the clergyman was thoroughly roused, and, being "valiant for truth," struck right honest and earnest blows at Romanism, regardless of consequences; and, not being content to fight alone, called another clergyman, a famous Protestant champion, to his aid. This clergyman drove into the village in a black carriage, drawn by two black horses, and driven by a black coachman, and immediately the services closed this strange equipage drove him away. Great excitement prevailed

in the parish, and large numbers attended the services, among whom were many wild and sinful young men, some of whom were "pricked to the heart." Opposition was, however, effectually stirred; the squire's influence prevailed; the good clergyman had to leave, and was succeeded by a man of an entirely different type. But two, at least, of the young men referred to were too deeply moved to find rest anywhere but in Christ; and, so long as the good clergyman remained they diligently attended his ministry, though he was unable to guide them into peace. He had shown them "Moses with his flaming sword," but he could not show them Calvary. On his departure from the village, however, they found out the humble services of the Methodists, which had for some time been held in their midst, and there they found the way of the Lord more perfectly, and entered into the rest of faith. They both became active and zealous workers; one was soon made a local preacher, and laboured many years with diligence and success, while the other remained at his duty in the Sabbath-school for a few years only, until his Master called him home. But as his life was fraught with much good, and teaches many lessons, though it was early closed, we are sure the reader will allow us to linger over it a little. He was remarkable for deep piety and a consistent life—two mighty powers for gaining influence, acquiring character, and effecting good. He carried on a laborious trade, which had, however, the one great advantage of giving him long and frequent walks across the country, when he employed himself in communion with God, and roused the slumbering echoes of the hills and vales with the voice of praise and prayer. But these happy opportunities, instead of satisfying his ardent spirit, only seemed to increase his appetite; and if the furniture of

the village chapel could speak it would tell of many a lonely watchnight held by our young brother within the chapel walls; for he did not wait for the "passing" of the old year, but often watched through the midnight hour, all silent and alone. The result of such frequent communion was soon perceived in a life which presented a perfect contrast to the old life of sin, and which made a great impression upon his old companions, and especially upon his brothers. These, like himself, were godless and thoughtless to the last degree, for there had been no religious influence in their home or in their family for many generations; they came from a sturdy and industrious, but notoriously godless, race. When, however, the elder brother became so changed, the younger ones looked on with wonder, and when invited to the Methodist chapel, that they too might learn to walk the path of goodness, "beholding the man which was healed" standing with them, they could not choose but go. One of them, though now so far away from everything like religion, was yet in some measure prepared to receive good; for, when a little boy, he had attended the Methodist Sunday-school. One scene, occurring years before, had made an impression on his mind that could not be destroyed by all the thoughtlessness of youth, and was referred to in his "silver age" as the first softening, elevating touch his nature ever received. And yet it was very simple—only a touch, a word, and a look from "a holy man of God."

The Rev. Joseph Burgess, then superintendent of the circuit, came one Sunday afternoon to preach at Overtown, and after service paused to say a few words to the children. His fine form, military bearing, and kindly manner made a deep impression; and, as he passed on



towards the door, he laid his hand upon the head of the lad nearest to him, and "hoped he would grow up to be good." This was all, but, as we have seen, it laid a foundation for after years, and prepared the ground to receive seed which should afterwards yield a blessed harvest. Surely it were well to remember that just as small acorns produce great oaks, so small acts of loving-kindness produce great results; the destinies of the future hang upon the threads of gossamer that are being spun to-day. And so, both these young men were first aroused, then convinced, and soon savingly converted. Both became class-leaders and local preachers; and, in addition to this, one acted first as teacher, and then as superintendent in a village Sunday-school. Shortly after their conversion one removed to one village, and the other to another, in opposite directions. The elder found a feeble Methodist cause in his new home, which he at once joined and earnestly and consistently supported through a long life, becoming the main, if not the only, instrument of erecting a chapel in connection with it, and otherwise extending its influence. The younger removed to a place where no Methodist service was held, and, opening his house for the Methodist preachers, saw much spiritual good effected, and a handsome village chapel built.

And all this was the result of the kindly work of this elder brother, who became the apostle of his family, and their benefactor in every way for generations to come; and that, simply because he acted out the first law of Christianity, and went *first* to his own brothers, doing it earnestly, and "working while it was day." There was, indeed, need for him to make haste, though he knew it not, for very soon his sun went down, and long before he reached his prime, or knew one tithe of the

blessed results of his own work, he was called home. His younger brothers married, and their children, being trained in goodness, became in due time converted, identified with Methodism, and some of them useful in its various spheres of work. One became a minister. He is a friend of the writer, and has often spoken to him of his "Uncle Robert." Only a few days ago he said, "That name has been a blessed influence in our family for many years. I have one book in my study that I *could* not sell for more than half-a-crown (Wesley's *Notes*), but that I *would* hardly sell for half a world, because it belonged to him. I never saw him; he died soon after I was born; but I owe him my all. What he did for my father he did for me, for in benefiting him he blessed me, and one of my first and most delightful employments in heaven will be to thank him for his influence upon my father's family and upon myself." Over his grave "they raised not a stone and carved not a line;" the long grass grows over it in a neglected country churchyard, and it is not to be distinguished from its fellows, but his memory is lovingly cherished, because his heart was kind and his work for Christ lasting and effective.

And his good deeds through the ages,  
Living in fond memory's pages,  
Brighter grow and gleam immortal,  
Unconsumed by moth or rust.

Over the work done by the Methodists in Overtown we would gladly linger. Many trophies did they win there for the Saviour, and much devotion did they display in connection with their labours. But, of course, most of those who were won from sin were the ordinary every-day people of a country village, who, for the most part, live and die—

Unmentioned, as the wave which forms and breaks  
On undiscovered shore,

and so they have left but little trace upon the sands of time. Their lives were as important to them, however, as those of nobles and gentles are to their possessors, and it was no small thing for them that they were made pure and happy, and that their souls now rest in peace.

The Methodists of Overtown had their persecutions, but not of a very virulent kind. A number of living sparrows let suddenly loose in the chapel during the most solemn part of the service, the calling derisive names, and the loss of social status, seemed to be among the worst of their annoyances. But on one occasion more serious persecution was intended. Only two or three Methodist services had been held in the village when it became suddenly known one summer afternoon that a Methodist preacher from Severnburry was about to begin a service on the village green. News was carried to the ringers, who were sending forth a merry peal from the belfry of the village church, and they at once agreed to pull the preacher down and stop the service. But they paused to listen for a few minutes before beginning work, and those few minutes were fatal to their plan, for their attention was arrested, and long before the service ended the preacher's Master pulled *them* down. Five out of the six were truly converted, and joined the Methodists, and one yet lingers, an old Christian, on the verge of heaven, thanking God every day for "Village Methodism."

The five ringers, thus unexpectedly and blessedly converted, at once became good Christians and devoted workers. By their efforts preaching services and a Sunday-school were established in a cottage which belonged

to a farmer who was converted about the same time, and two of whose daughters walked four miles every Sunday to assist in teaching the children. After a while the services were removed to the house of a man named Powell, whose son was converted, became a local preacher, and, after many years of faithful service, died in the Lord. He has, however, left two sons, who are working hard as local preachers to-day, and thus instead of the fathers have come the children. As the work prospered a chapel was built, was soon filled, and became a great blessing to the village ; and still Methodism lives in Overtown. Thanking God for what it has been, and praying that it may have more grace, we leave it to what we trust may be a prosperous future.

## CHAPTER V.

### Forward Ho!

THE village of Sinfulton lies among the hills in the northern part of the county of Middleshire. The district around it is wholly agricultural, it is not in close proximity to any large town, and therefore the villagers have been left pretty much to their own devices. Consequently things have always worn a somewhat sleepy, after-dinner aspect; and although seeds were sown, harvests gathered, and seasons came and went there as elsewhere, yet no man in Sinfulton troubled himself much about these things—or any other matter under the sun. So, of course, there was nothing like “public opinion,” which might exert a beneficial influence upon the morals of the place. Not that Sinfulton did not need it, for it had its shortcomings like other places, and one that some other places are happily free from to a large extent—viz., a great lack of sober people. “England’s curse” had found its way to this village, and the soil must have been congenial, for it flourished amain. Drunkenness prevailed to a large extent. Almost all classes were affected by it—the farmers, the tradesmen, the labourers, and, with very great sorrow we are compelled to add, the teachers of religion also. In Sinfulton it was “like priest, like people,” and consequently drinking, sin, and misery held undisputed sway.

This was, briefly, the condition of the place when the Methodists entered it seventy or eighty years ago. From

what point they first entered the village, what difficulties they met, how they conquered them, and the story of their trials and triumphs would be a most interesting chapter in the history of village Methodism ; but, leaving the tempting theme, we hasten on to tell one remarkable story connected with their labours there. Soon after they commenced regular preaching in the village, God blessed them with one of those outpourings of His Spirit which resulted in the revivals so common in those days, and many of which were given to Methodism in Sinfulton. The villagers were much attracted by these "Revivals." Hearing that one and another notoriously ungodly character was getting "converted" led others to venture, and as they, too, caught the holy fire, it spread itself more widely. Then a number of youths began to attend the services, many of whom received good, the most striking case being that of young Wildman. His father was the village butcher, and was a wild man indeed. He was a good tradesman, and quite capable of maintaining his family in comfort and respectability, but, alas ! he was a drunkard. His drunkenness carried with it many other sins, such as disregard for the Sabbath and the ordinances of religion, and a general hardness and recklessness of character which made his life more wild and wilful, and seemed effectually to prevent any entrance of that which was good. With such a father the young convert was not likely to lead a very happy life. So it soon proved ; for, although he had not scrupled to obey his father's orders in supplying the customers with meat on Sundays, before his conversion, he dared not do so afterwards. For some weeks he had a great struggle between his duty to his father and his duty to his God ; but after much prayer he decided to "obey God rather than men."

One Sunday morning, therefore, he rose early, and, taking some food in his pocket, walked to the town of Maxfield, some miles distant. The summer's sun shone beautifully, the songs of the birds filled the Sabbath air with music, and our young friend's heart was filled with the love of God. So, doing his utmost to forget his troubles, and the fearful reckoning he knew he must have with his infuriated father the following morning, he hastened on. Arrived at the end of his journey, he attended the morning's service at the Methodist chapel, then retired to the churchyard of the old parish church, and, sitting upon one of the gravestones beneath a friendly tree, ate his scanty dinner. So soon as the chapel-doors were open, he entered them to attend the afternoon service, and, after eating the remnants of his dinner in the same place in which he dined, he attended the evening service, and walked home. In order to avoid his father's anger, at least for that night, he crept stealthily to bed, but in the morning the storm broke. Stern and violent questionings on the part of the father, respectful but frank and decided answers on the part of the son, and then the father's hand was lifted, and cruel blows fell thick and fast upon the poor lad whose only fault was that he was trying to be good. This went on for several weeks, the son absenting himself on the Sunday, and paying his heavy penalty on the Monday morning, until he felt he could bear it no longer, and, after casting about for some escape, decided to run away from his home. His little wardrobe was gathered, and without much compression packed into one small parcel, and early one beautiful morning young Wildman "went out, not knowing whither he went." The early sun greeted him with warmth and cheeriness, and the air was bright and balmy, but his



heart was heavy. Like Jacob, in a distant land and a far-off century, he went out with a trembling footstep, but not like Jacob, thank God ! with a great sin behind him, nor yet, alas ! like Jacob, with a friend before him ; for beyond his native village, friend or relation he had none. Certainly all the world was before him where to choose, but without money or recommendation a stouter heart than his might well have quailed at the prospect. But he was leaving home for conscience' sake, and literally he walked by faith. Nor did the God of the brave and true forsake him, for, as we shall see, his steps were ordered by the Lord.

All day long he continued his journey, and although he passed through the town of Maxfield in the middle of the day, he did not seek employment or help in it of any kind, but after lingering a few moments to look upon the gravestone that had been his seat and his table, and the tree that had spread its friendly shelter over him for the last few Sundays, he hurried on. But "when the evening sun was low" he had become hungry, weary, and footsore, and as he passed through the village of Oxsmithy, began to look around for help and shelter. Seeing a clean and motherly woman standing at a cottage-door, he told her his sorrowful story, and opening at the same time her heart and her home, she bade him welcome to his supper and a bed. Early in the morning she gave him his breakfast, and, with many kind words and much motherly counsel, sent him away. Turning his face still northwards, he pushed on, passing through Hilltown, with its busy mills, and through the still larger and busier town of Cottonham. Why did he not pause in one of these great centres of industry, and seek employment ? He himself often wondered afterwards, and could only explain it by saying that he acted just

according to his thoughts and feelings at the time, and that he believed God directed him. Some few miles out of Cottonham he overtook some butchers driving home the cattle they had purchased in that day's market. As they were men connected with the only trade he understood, it occurred to him to ask them for something to do. So, joining one of the men, he said, "I am a poor lad that has had to leave my home because I won't work on the Sunday; do you know anybody that could give me work?" "Yes," said the man, "go to such a house in such a street in the next town, and tell them I sent you; they want just such a lad as you." With what a light heart did our young pilgrim walk on! half his weariness left him at once. At the address given him, he met with the mistress of the house, who proved to be a godly woman, and who, after hearing his tale, said, "Come in, my lad, and I'll be a mother to you." Here he found suitable employment and a comfortable home, and in fulfilling his duties, attending the means of grace, and reading, and otherwise improving his mind, the time passed by pleasantly.

But while he was thus happy, sad things were happening in his native village. A dangerous and violent fever made its appearance there, rapidly spreading from house to house. It seized many victims, but was especially fatal to the heads of families; many fathers were smitten down, and the wail of orphans was heard on every hand. Wildman, the butcher, was seized among the rest, but, thanks to his iron constitution, did not die. So soon, however, as he was able to leave his room, he made his way to the alehouse, and in a few hours returned to his home intoxicated, when the fever returned with renewed force, and in a few hours more he was dead. A large family of children was thus left unprovided for, and it

became necessary to recall the eldest brother. Not one moment did he hesitate to obey the call of duty, but, leaving all the comforts of his new home, hastened to the help of his mother and his helpless brothers and sisters. He took charge of his father's business, which he found encumbered with debt, and worked it with intelligence, honesty, and success. Very soon the debts were paid, and a comfortable home made for the mother and children, who were all fed, clothed, and educated by the kindness of that elder brother. One of his first acts, on settling in his native village, was to commence a Sunday-school in connection with the Methodist chapel there. In this, and other Christian labours, all the time he could spare from his business was employed, and many in Sinfulton and elsewhere had good cause to bless his name.

He now sleeps in peace, but his works follow him. He lived a respectable and godly life for some years, and then died a Christian death, but not before he had seen almost all his brothers and sisters converted to God, and some of them rising into positions of honour and respect. One of them, however, must have more particular mention than the others, and with a brief account of his brilliant career we close this sketch. Of course he attended the Methodist chapel in his native village; for the elder brother saw that the little ones Providence had committed to his care should attend that place where he himself had received untold good. In the case of Ernest the school teaching and ministry of the Word were not in vain. While quite a boy he was deeply impressed for good, and long before he became a man was a decided Christian. His school duties were vigorously prosecuted, and he gave fair promise of leading a successful and useful life. As the finances of the

family were limited, Ernest was early sent to a situation as errand-boy in a large and respectable shop in the nearest town, where he conducted himself with steadiness and diligence, winning the entire approval of his employers. As his subsequent career will show, he must have had a natural genius for mercantile life, and while in this situation that genius first manifested itself. After two or three years of town life he returned to his native village to live with his mother, but as his genius prompted him to trade, and as he must do something to win his daily bread, he commenced a small shop in his mother's house, exposing his goods for sale in the little cottage window. Villagers came to purchase, first out of kindness and curiosity; but when they found the young shopkeeper so intelligent and enterprising, they came again and brought others with them, and so the business prospered. But it occurred to our young friend that he could do more if he had it to do, and inasmuch as it did not come to him he would go to it. So away he started, a commercial traveller on his own account, to call upon the farmers and others, soliciting orders. The orders were given and executed, and the little business grew apace. Success begets success, which proved true in this case, for when Ernest saw that he got on so famously in so limited a sphere, he began to ask himself, "What could I not do if I had more room?" The village had now become too narrow for his enterprising spirit, and he took a shop in a neighbouring town. The same principles of integrity, earnestness, and enterprise that made the business prosper in the cottage of his native village, made it prosper in the large shop in the town; God blessed him, and his goods increased more and more. Another shop was taken, and then another, and shortly the retail was given up for

the wholesale business, and a large central depot was established in one of our largest inland towns. Finally, however, this was also relinquished for something better, and Ernest is now permanently established in one of the largest seaports of the country. His business still prospers, and extends into all parts of this land and many parts of America ; its "turn-over" amounts to *upwards of a million sterling every year*, and it is the largest business of its kind in England, probably in the world. The village boy is now living as a "merchant prince," and is not yet an old man. And though he has such a magnificent business, and lives in a very fine house, he still retains his Christianity and his connection with the Church that has done so much for him, and is not ashamed to confess that he owes his all, under God, to Village Methodism.

## CHAPTER VI.

### Hillchurch.

HILLCHURCH might have stood for the original of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* better than any place we know — that is, before Goldsmith's village became deserted, and as it existed in the days of its prosperity. The great appropriateness of some of the lines makes the temptation to quote them irresistible:—

“ Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,  
Where smiling spring its earliest visits paid,  
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed,  
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,  
Where humble happiness endeared each scene!  
How often have I paused on every charm—  
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,  
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
The decent church that topp'd the neighbouring hill;  
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,  
For talking age and whispering lovers made.”

Standing beneath the shadow of the church that topp'd the hill, what a scene met your view! A magnificent valley lay beneath, stretching around on every hand. Farms, orchards, and cottages, cornlands, pastures, luxuriant vegetation, and a rich, well-watered vale in the highest state of culture; away under the distant hills to the right the blue smoke of a large town, and down in the lowlands to the left the darker smoke of a large

city, with the old tower of the cathedral lifting its massive form above it—and a light puff of steam issuing from the railway train that ran in the valley below—altogether presented one of the fairest pictures upon which the eye of man ever gazed. Upon such a spot might Macaulay have stood when he drew that beautiful fancy in which he describes Bacon standing upon the Pisgah of his new philosophy and looking upon the promised land into which it should conduct the happier generations of the future.\*

From this the reader will gather that the hill was really a hill and not a mere hillock, and when we tell him that a hearse could only be drawn up the winding lane that led to the church upon its summit by the aid of three or four cart horses in addition to the number usually drawing it, and that when men carried a corpse up the steep ascent the coffin maker had to go before holding a rope attached to the coffin, and pulling with all his strength, in order to keep it from slipping backwards off the shoulders of the bearers, he will see that he is correct. "Then," exclaims a practical reader, "why in the name of common sense build the church there?" Why, indeed, especially when almost the entire population of the parish lived in the valleys. Insiders and outsiders, tourists who passed that way once in a lifetime, and men who lived in the village all their days had tried to answer that question; for nobody could look upon the church, standing as a solitary sentinel keeping watch and ward over the valleys below it and the silent dead that slept beneath its shadow, without exclaiming, "What a place to build a church!" As it has been built well-nigh a thousand years, of course there are traditions connected with its early days, and legends that account, in

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\* Macaulay's *Essay on Bacon*, p. 417. London: 1872.



a more or less satisfactory manner, for its strange position. One of these, and the one most frequently quoted, is, that when the people of Hillchurch had decided to build a church, they selected a spot (which is pointed out to the inquirer), gathered materials, and began operations. But as fast as they built in the vale in the day, just so fast the devil took down at night, and built the same materials upon the top of the hill. The good people of Hillchurch fought the uneven battle for a long time, but as they were only natural beings fighting against supernatural, they were at length beaten, Satan had his way, and the church stands upon the top of the hill, a lasting witness to the truth of this remarkable story; another proof of which is found in the fact that Hillchurch is known to many to this day by the name of "Devil's Parish." But, supposing some of our readers do not think this likely to be true, we think we can help them to a less romantic though more reasonable explanation. Perhaps one reason why the church was built upon the hill was that the stones of which it was built were quarried there, and could not be found in any other part of the parish. Or perhaps the reason was that as the church had to serve two villages, one on either side the hill, and as the inhabitants in neither case would consent to go *over* the hill, the difficulty was met by building it upon the summit and making both go *up* the hill. Or, perhaps—who can tell?—in the days when this church was built the remarkable disease of Sunday sickness had not developed itself, and the good people of Hillchurch were as well able to walk on Sundays as other days, and believed that a short journey to the house of God would be good for them. The reader must take upon himself the responsibility of deciding which of these conjectures is most reasonable.

Hillchurch was like Goldsmith's "sweet Auburn" not only for its beauty and other characteristics, but also because it was out of the way. Though not very far from large and populous places, yet no high road ran through it, and no one ever thought of visiting it unless they had business in it. It would not have been strange, therefore, if Methodism had never found its way there. But such was not the case, for the zeal of our fathers carried them into the most unlikely places, and among others to Hillchurch. About eighty years have passed away since the first Methodist preacher entered Hillchurch. His name has perished from the records of this world, but is doubtless known and honoured in heaven. So far as we can discover, the first services were held in the open air upon the village green, but very soon a few of the villagers became converted, a class was formed, a cottage was opened, and regular services were held.

The Methodists were much needed, and had ample scope in the village. Service was usually held in the church once a week—viz., on the Sabbath afternoon, beyond which no effort was made to benefit the people in any way. We say *usually*, for it sometimes happened that this one solitary meal was dispensed with. Sometimes, when the weather was very bad, the incumbent, who lived about two miles from the church, did not feel disposed to go, and, after the bell had commenced passing out for the service, would send a lad to tell the people he should not come, whereupon the bell ceased, the people dispersed, and the church door was locked.\* And sometimes he would call to see a gentlemanly old farmer named Green, who lived on his way to the church. Now

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\* The man who took this message, as a lad, is well known to the writer, and is not yet fifty years of age.

Mr. Green was noted for keeping remarkably good cider, as he himself used to say, "Bless'ee if you'll drink plenty o' my zider, it'll make 'ee zing in yer zleep." And when the clergyman and Mr. Green became comfortably settled, the former sometimes forgot the service, and when the people were tired of waiting they went home. But of course these things did not often happen, and the service was usually held. The mere fact, however, that such things ever happened showed that the Methodists were needed. And they came, and prospered in their work. The cottage in which their services were held, their class met, and their school taught was a very humble one, and was kept by very humble people. The husband was a farm-labourer, and had been benefited by the Methodist services, though he never joined the Society, but the wife, "Old Molly," was an earnest and devoted, and—considering her few advantages and humble position—an intelligent Christian. She was truly converted under the preaching, met in class, witnessed a good confession, and died in the Lord. The services, being held in so primitive a place, were held in a primitive manner. For years after they were commenced, there was neither desk nor pulpit for the use of the preacher; he stood in a corner of the room, and held the hymn-book or Bible in his hand. Immediately behind his back was the "pantry." The door of this "pantry" was about the same height as the preacher; consequently, the shelf that was placed inside at the top of the door was level with his head. On one occasion a cat had perched itself upon the shelf, and through the bars above the door could just see something moving about outside. So, to gratify its curiosity, it put its paw through the bars, and was gravely engaged in examining the preacher's head with it, while he as gravely preached

to the people. He was ignorant of what was going on, but the congregation being able to see the whole transaction, could not repress a smile, while the lads laughed outright. Incidents of a like character often happened in these simple services, but never to their serious detriment, or to the prevention of good, much of which was effected.

Several young men who began their training as Christian workers in this village afterwards became local preachers, and were gladdened in subsequent years of toil by men and women who came to them after the service, in distant villages, saying, "Oh ! Mr. —, I am so glad to see you. What ! don't you remember me ? I used to stand at your knee in the school at Hillchurch, and there I got my first good." And numberless other cases there were in which the soul was blessed, and the weary steps cheered in the path of life, of which the workers never knew. But of those they did know, so many crowd upon us that we must find space for some of them.

William Kidman was a thoughtless youth who had formerly attended the Sunday-school for a short time, but had left, and apparently forgotten all the good he had been taught there. After a few years given up to youthful follies, he began to attend the village services, and soon became impressed by the power of truth. He yielded his heart to the Saviour, and at once began to live to Him and work for Him. He was employed upon the railway, and in the course of a few years was put in charge of a "signal-box," in a responsible and somewhat dangerous position. One dark winter's night he stepped out of his "box" on to the line of rails to signal a train, when an engine came slowly and noiselessly along the line upon which he was standing, and in a moment he

was struck down and dreadfully maimed. He was carried to the infirmary, where he lingered about a week in much suffering, but great peace. He was called to die in the prime of life, and to leave behind him a wife and family, but none of these things moved him. His victory was evident, his triumph undoubted. The men who occupied the other beds in the ward were moved to tears by his sad fate, and were led to penitence, to thoughtfulness, and, in some cases, to Christ by his earnest exhortations and the evident power of his religion.

Two girls sat in the same class in the Sunday-school, and were fast passing out of girlhood into young womanhood. One was named Ann Smith, and was noted as being rough, disobedient, and dreadfully bad-tempered. Sullenness and obstinacy seemed to be as much parts of her nature as her nose was of her face. She gave her teacher, and every one else that had anything to do with her, much trouble. But one Sunday afternoon she reached the crisis of her history. Her temper seemed so bad that she might have been "possessed," and she had to be withdrawn from the class and prayed over and spoken with most seriously. Then the proud heart broke down, and the Lord healed her spirit, and from that hour she was as much noted for docility and Christian grace as she had been for the reverse. The other girl was named Mary Davies, and was quite a contrast to her classmate. She was blooming and pretty, yet tender and delicate, a fair and fragile flower. The grace of God soon won its blessed way to the very depths of her gentle nature, and beautified and adorned her naturally amiable character until it was surpassingly lovely. For a few years she lived to be the flower of the cottage home, and a sweet and gentle influence wherever she moved, but consumption set in, and

she drooped away. More surely, however, than Tennyson's "Queen of the May," she heard the songs of the angels in her dying chamber, for she had lived a life of Christian love and angelic purity. Those villagers who saw her in her illness never forgot her, and those who looked upon her sweet face after Death had put his seal upon it, instead of fearing death, seemed to be nearer heaven. And numbers of others, both young and old, were led into the right way. Part have "crossed the flood," and their dust has been borne from their cottage homes to its last resting-place beneath the shadow of the church upon the hill, where it rests "in hope," and part are "to the margin come," while yet another part are toiling in the busy harvest-field under the noonday sun.

"Were the Methodists ever persecuted in Hillchurch?" Yes, by being hooted after by village rustics, ridiculed by village wits, looked down upon by village grandees, and denied village charities; nothing more, except one circumstance which we must in faithfulness record. A good Methodist woman—in every way consistent, and much respected by all parties in the village—died. The day for the funeral was fixed, and all arrangements completed with clergyman and sexton. On a lovely summer's afternoon the corpse was carried to the grave by the "leader" and other Methodists. The Rev. Mr. Careless (referred to in Sketch No. 2) was the clergyman. Judge of the surprise, grief, and indignation of the mourners when the sexton met them at the church-door and informed them that Mr. Careless would not allow the corpse to enter the church. All remonstrance was in vain, and all explanations were denied; only in a round-about way the mourners were given to understand that the reason she was kept out of the church was because

she was a Methodist, and, certainly, there was no other. "Then," they said, "we will dispense with the clergyman's services altogether." So they bore her to the graveside, sang a hymn, and after the "leader" had prayed, committed her dust to the earth. The sun shone upon the beautiful hill and the rich valley beneath, and such an act seemed a double profanation in so fair a scene. Surely the great Father must have looked down with infinite sorrow and anger upon this exhibition of the littleness of man.

We regret to have to close this sketch by saying that though the Methodists of Hillchurch succeeded in obtaining a chapel, they were content to *rent* it. For a time all went well, but when "another king arose that knew not Joseph," they received notice to quit, and after seventy years' connection with the place, had to leave it. From which we gather the important lesson—In all villages, if possible, erect chapels, but in *all* cases let them be settled upon Connexional principles, so that their use may be secured to us and our children.



## CHAPTER VII.

John Goodall, Esq., J.P.

“YOUR home, during your stay, will be with John Goodall, Esq., J.P., of Broadfield House, whose carriage will meet you at the station.” Such were the words used by the superintendent of a country circuit to a ministerial friend of the writer’s a few months ago. But who is John Goodall, Esq.? And how did he become a J.P. and the owner of Broadfield House and a carriage to boot? To answer these questions shall be the business of this sketch. But in order to do so we must take the reader into a country village, named Cumberton, situated in one of the most pleasant counties of England, and not far from the busy market town of Tradebury ; and we must ask him to go back just half a century.

About that time the Primitive Methodists found their way to Cumberton. They began their services on the village green, and as their message was owned of God in the conversion of some of the villagers, a cottage-house was opened to them, and regular preaching services were continued. Better accommodation and more regular work led to still greater success, and soon a neat little chapel was erected, which was speedily filled. Not that there was as much attraction in the way of rank, or fashion, or song as there was in the church, or, rather, chapel-of-ease, which had been built within the park, and close to the hall where the great family resided to

whom Cumberton and many surrounding villages belonged. The "Primitive" Chapel was a primitive building, the people who attended it were dressed in primitive style, the preachers preached in a primitive way, and the singing was very primitive indeed. So much so, in fact, that the people of the chapel themselves thought it should be improved, and endeavoured to improve it accordingly. The simple choir had hitherto been led by the flute of "old Dan'l," but, as the flute was feeble in itself, and "Dan'l" more feeble still, and, moreover, "very slow," a go-ahead brother, with a powerful clarionet, was engaged to assist him. So a practice was arranged, and next Sunday evening the "improved" service began. But the clarionet was too fast and the flute too slow, and at the close of the verse they were half a line apart. The musicians were angry, the choir broke down, the congregation tittered, and, in confidential conversation with a friend, the clarionet said: "Never again; why, old Dan'l ha'n't got wind enough to blow a tin whistle." The experiment having thus failed, the flute resumed his leadership.

But, despite these drawbacks, "mightily grew the Word of God, and prevailed." The preachers spoke with power, the singing was full of heart and life, and many blessed revivals took place. One of these is remembered with especial favour, inasmuch as it resulted in the conversion of a number of young men, many of whom became useful in after years, and some of whom began to pray in the prayer-meetings immediately after their conversion, with great simplicity and fervour, and still greater originality. One of them exclaimed, after a few broken utterances, "Thank God, Thou hast giv' us plenty o' vittal, and a good appetite to 'ate it." And another, after listening to a powerful sermon on the

three Hebrew children, prayed, "Lord, make these Cumbertonians just such men as them Babylonians." Religious milliners and dandies would think this shocking, no doubt, and our friend Heavyface, who thought so much of the proprieties of worship, and cared so little for that which is natural, simple, and earnest in religion, would mutter something about "zeal without knowledge," and, "young men being kept in their right places," &c., &c., which was very good, in its way ; but how refreshing it would be if all men would speak to God their simple wants out of full and loving hearts, as these young men did, rather than address Him in such inflated and unmeaning eloquence as we sometimes hear.

But our young converts proved their sincerity by their consistency.

Among the results of this "revival" was the conversion of the father of "John Goodall, Esq., J.P." Not that he was either an esquire, or a J.P., but a man in humble circumstances, cultivating a little land, and employed in some little offices of trust by the family of the Baronet who resided at the hall. His conversion, however, was genuine, and, thenceforth, he brought up his family in the most devout attendance upon religious worship, in the practice of virtue, and in the strictest integrity. Some of them were early converted, and all of them grew up strictly moral and outwardly consistent, John being among the latter. By circumstances it is not needful to detail here, however, he began to attend the Wesleyan chapel at Tradebury when a young man, though he never lost his love for his old friends the "Primitives," and always proved it by deeds of liberality. And although he remained for many years unconverted, his character was in all respects highly satisfactory, much more so, indeed, than that of some who profess much religion. His word

was more sacred than some men's bond, his conversation was free from impurity and trifling, and in the management of most responsible and extensive business transactions he was honoured as an exceptionally upright and straightforward man. Indeed, you could not look upon him without thinking of the Saviour's tenderness towards the young man whom to look upon was to love, and also, unhappily, of the Saviour's words, "One thing thou lackest;" though the thing that our friend lacked was not, as was the case with the young ruler, generosity, which he possessed to a remarkable extent. What *he* lacked was soul religion; in the very citadel of his heart self was enthroned, and though he heard his Master's voice, and loved it, and though the outworks of his soul were held for Christ, his inmost nature had never felt His power. Still he had "grace prevenient" in a remarkable degree. The influences of Christianity, operating through village Methodism, had not been in vain, for they gave him steadiness, steadfastness, and self-control, and, added to good natural abilities, enabled him to make his way in the world; while they kept him as a regular attendant on the means of grace, and, eventually, led him to the Saviour.

When quite a young man he was made bailiff on a farm, under "Sir Thomas," and succeeded both in giving satisfaction to his employer and taking care of his own interests. His salary was £80 per year, and at the end of the first year he had laid by eighty-three bright sovereigns, thus, as he often used to say, saving £83 out of a salary of £80. But it must be explained that he had so much per week as board wages for two farm servants and himself, and out of this amount he saved the £3, in addition to which he had kept his salary intact.

This fact shows that John had force of character, that

he was a man apt to walk in his own paths, and ask opinions and advice of himself—in one word, that he was a strong man. We have heard him relate an incident pertaining to those days, which, if the reader still needs to be convinced of this, will do it. He was a great rider, often riding seven hours a day in the prosecution of his duties, and as he always rode spirited horses was often thrown, but by frequent use he could fall easily and safely, generally alighting upon one knee. Frequent bruises, however, weakened it, wearing damp clothing for a few hours brought on a crisis, and the joint became so stiffened that it could not be bent, and John was unable to walk. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have called in the doctor, but not so our friend. One of his farm servants was clever in doctoring cows and horses, and assured him it was only rheumatics, and he could cure it if he would faithfully follow his instructions. The promise being given, the “doctor” began his operations by procuring a pint and a half bottle of the very best old Scotch whiskey; then, in default of a bath, a large tub was taken upstairs and filled with water, as near as possible to boiling point, in which our friend was made to stand breast high and drink half a pint of the whiskey neat, and well spiced with cayenne. After fifteen minutes of this, a vapour bath was improvised, with a chair, blankets, &c., in which another fifteen minutes was spent, and another half pint of whiskey taken as before. Then the patient was put into bed under eight blankets, and after the third and last half pint of whiskey had been taken went to sleep. The perspiration was almost incredible, completely saturating a feather bed, and it was that, we suppose, which prevented such “treatment” from killing him. But after eight hours’ sleep he awoke, and the first thought oc-

curring to him was, "How is my knee?" To his great joy he found he could move it; with a vigorous kick he sent the blankets on to the floor, and has never had a moment's uneasiness or trouble with it since. When the medical man was told by our friend afterwards that he could give him a recipe for the cure of the rheumatics, which he might apply to his patients, he opened his eyes very widely, and said, "If I did I should very soon have no patients left." None but a man of iron constitution and iron will could have gone through such an ordeal, and one who could, and would, would have done well for Cromwell's Ironsides, or to have been in the following of that Scottish chieftain who, when he found his son sleeping on the bare ground with his head on a pillow of snow, pushed it from under him, saying, "I will have no effeminacy here; I want robust men."

With such qualities of resolution, practical knowledge, and integrity, John was bound to rise, and being "faithful in that which was least," he was soon promoted to a higher station; the steward of Sir Thomas leaving, he was at once elected to fill his place. In his larger sphere his character and influence daily increased, and by his judicious and upright management of his employer's affairs he exalted his character and influence as well as his own; at the same time he added to his own store, and, by careful savings and wise bargains, became a man of substance.

Still, he was often unhappy and dissatisfied, and by painful experience knew the misery of having an "aching void" in his heart, which not all his outward goodness and prosperity could ever fill. But now, at length, after years of waiting, he was to find the mercy of God, which came about on this wise: an American revivalist preached one Sunday evening at the Wesleyan Chapel

in Tradebury, and in the course of his sermon said, "I scarcely ever knew or heard of a single instance where a man or woman was converted after forty-five years of age." The arrow went home, for John was exactly that age, and he said to himself, "I am at the great crisis of my life ; if I do not get saved now, I never shall."

For weeks he sought rest, but finding none, became weary in mind, discouraged in heart, and ill in body ; his difficulties being increased by his great reserve, which prevented his seeking help from those who might have given it him. But, being unable longer to contain himself, and hearing that revival services were being held in the public hall of a large city, thirty miles away, he went, thinking, "There nobody will know me, and I can become an inquirer, and find peace." At the close of the service he entered the inquiry-room, and knelt down to pray, when the very first person who spoke to him was a young man from his native village, who was much surprised to see him in such a state and place. Then a town missionary came to his side, and prayed and talked with him until the lights were turned down, and afterwards walked about the streets with him until nearly midnight, pointing him to the Saviour. But when they parted he was still unhappy, and by the light of a street lamp the missionary wrote his address, and, handing it to our friend, said : "So soon as you find Jesus send me a line ;" and with prayers and tears left him. The next Sunday night he was in his usual place at the Methodist chapel, and as soon as the prayer-meeting commenced, being in an agony of earnestness, he felt it must be *now or never*, and immediately walked forward to the communion-rail, and knelt down. The people were very much surprised ; but, as he afterwards said, "I had got to that point that I should have gone forward if all



Tradebury had been there and Sir Thomas into the bargain." That night the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and the violent took it by force, for John "found the Messias," and lives to this hour, most unmistakably, in the sunshine of his Saviour's love. From that time his life has been one of the sweetest and best, rich in quiet and unostentatious, but practical and blessed, work for Christ. Many public-houses in the villages on Sir Thomas's estate have been closed, and, in some instances, are being used for the holding of prayer-meetings, class-meetings, and preaching services. *No man is ever refused a farm on the estate because he is a Methodist*, and thus the cause of Village Methodism all over the district is strengthened and perpetuated. Our friend has a large purse and a liberal hand, and whatever enlargements of the "plant," extension of the work, or reduction of debt may be going on in the circuit, his subscription usually heads the list. Of him, as much as of any man that ever filled such a post, it may be said that "as a steward he has been found faithful;" almost literally his master knows not what is in his hand, and trusts him with most implicit confidence. From the baronet who owns the estate down to the meanest tenant who lives upon it he is respected and loved, and when he was made magistrate everybody congratulated him upon having received a well-merited honour. He has for many years held the offices of way-warden, overseer, and guardian of the poor. Neither Sir Thomas nor himself ever votes or takes any part in political elections, because they prefer leaving their tenants entirely free in such matters, and so will not bias them by their example or influence. "I take interest in School Board elections," said he to the writer, "for a certain party wanted to have it all their own way, but we pre-

vented that, and have secured a Methodist as Chairman of the Board."

Mr. Goodall attends the "church in the park" once every Lord's Day. A few years ago a new clergyman was appointed, and very shortly began to enunciate some rather "high" doctrines in reference to the Sacraments. Mr. Goodall thereupon had a conversation with him, and very quietly and respectfully intimated that if such doctrines were preached, "he might not find it convenient to hear him." The clergyman expressed his regret, and not another word of the same sort has fallen from him since.

Thus we see that Village Methodism has been God's instrument in raising a poor youth to be "John Goodall, Esq., J.P., of Broadfield House," in making his life a witness for God, for integrity, for Protestantism, for political and religious freedom, and an immense power for good over a large district. John himself would say—

"O to grace how great a debtor,"

to which we say, Amen.

"We have not wings, we cannot soar;  
But we have feet to scale and climb  
By slow degrees, by more and more,  
The cloudy summits of our time.  
The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upwards in the night."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### "Our Margitt."

OUR object in telling this little story is not to encourage godly young women to marry ungodly young men, with the hope of leading them to the Saviour. That is often done. Scores of decent young women, many of whom are devout and Christian, and all of whom are attached to the "school and chapel," are taken away from our schools in Lancashire every year to become the wives of men who, though they have no religion themselves, have yet sense enough to know that young women who have been trained under religious influences make the best wives. In the great majority of cases the young woman believes all the ardent lover declares. It is sweet to her to think that her gentle influences and winning ways, her Christian character and magic power over this young man are to lead him away from sinful courses and wicked companions, and that as soon as they are "wed" he will walk with her to the house of God, and very soon, she hopes, become a Christian. That is the dream—and how seldom is it anything more. The reality is quite another thing. After marriage the wife finds her husband scarcely so good-tempered and docile as he was before. *Then* she could lead him with her little finger, *now* she finds a difficulty in regulating his movements with her whole hand, even aided by her tongue. So she has to go to chapel alone, or, as is far more frequently

the case, either stay at home with her husband, or without him, while his lordship "takes his walks abroad" with his smutty companions, or his smuttier dog, and smokes his still more smutty pipe. So that it often happens that religion loses one instead of gaining one—the wife is drawn down to the level of the husband rather than the husband lifted to the level of the wife. This is the general rule. We have heard of some exceptions, and we have seen one, which is now to be laid before the reader. But if any young woman believes that because we have known one case in which a Christian woman led her husband to Christ, therefore she may marry a godless man, we think she reads the lesson backwards, and would suggest to her that the true way of reading it is—if, in almost every case, the wife loses her piety, and sinks to her husband's level, it is a dangerous thing to marry a bad man, and I will not wager my soul against so many odds. But to the thousands who have done so, this story may afford a gleam of hope, and that is why we tell it.

Margaret Jones, or "our Margitt," as she was always called at home, belonged to a family in humble circumstances, and lived in the village of Littlehill. Her early life was hard and rough. Her father was for many years after his marriage a wandering navvy, and a wild, drunken man. Most of his earnings went to the landlord of the "Silent Woman," a public-house that had upon its sign the figure of a headless woman,—as though the rude artist intended to say that no woman ever was, or ever could be, silent so long as her head was on. "Margitt's" father, however, did not give much attention to the sign. He patronised the "Silent Woman" because the tap over which she presided was good, and because beneath her shadow he met with companions

after his own heart. In consequence of "father's" wastefulness, mother and the children, especially Margaret, who was the oldest, had to work harder than they should have done, and no day-school education could be afforded. The mother, however, retained her love for that which was good, and when the Sunday-school was opened in the vestry of the Methodist chapel in the village of Littlehill, Margaret and her brothers and sisters were among its first scholars. Happy was it for Margaret's family that the Methodists had found their way to her native village. They had preached there in the open air at intervals for many years, and had sometimes held services in cottages. But the people of Littlehill were determined to keep them out of the village if possible, and when all other means failed the church-bells were set ringing while the open-air service was going on. The Methodists, however, were not to be put down; they persevered, and Methodism is a blessing and an acknowledged power in Littlehill to-day.

The lessons of Sunday-school, the influences of public worship, and the power of God's Holy Spirit early wrought on Margaret's soul. When about seventeen she left home for service, and absence from teachers and others she had loved made her heart peculiarly susceptible of good. One day, while engaged in her ordinary domestic duties, she was thinking of old times and absent friends, and saying to herself, "O that I could be a Christian," when the thought occurred, "Why not?" and "Why not now, and here?" Light and help were graciously given, and she there and then grasped the Saviour as hers, and entered into the enjoyment and blessedness of His salvation. She at once wrote home to her mother, who had herself entered into the rest of faith a little

while before, telling her the good news, and mother and daughter rejoiced together.

Shortly after this the father was led to sign the temperance pledge, and attend the house of God, and eventually became a sober, steady, Christian man.

Circumstances it is not needful to detail here, led to Margaret's return home, when she at once joined "class," and led in every way a pious and consistent life. For some years she pursued the even tenor of her way, but when about twenty-four years of age she became engaged with heart and hand to Will Jones. How it happened we cannot tell. Will was decidedly unchristian and Margaret as decidedly Christian, and we are quite sure she did not meet him in any improper place—but how, when, or where she did meet him we know not. Two persons so widely different never *ought* to have met, but they *did* meet, for it was with them as it is in similar cases, we suppose; it happened "some-how."

"Like Dian's kiss, unasked, unsought,  
Love gives itself, but is not bought.  
It comes unaided and alone,  
To seek the elected one."

And so it came to Margaret. And, as it ended so well, we hardly like to say it ought not to have come to her in the person of Will Jones, lest we should seem to be questioning the ways of Providence, but certainly such a marriage did not promise well, for Will was a thoughtless and godless youth. He had not only no religion himself, but there was none in his family; so far as he knew, he had not, and never had, a godly relative of any kind. His life had been entirely free from religious influence, and had remained altogether untouched and unsoftened by unseen realities. He was not a drunkard,

though he would often be "spreeing" for days together, but his heart was hard, and his whole nature steeped in worldliness, callousness, and materialism.

Whether Margaret knew this or not before her marriage, she knew it soon afterwards, and saw that she had a prodigious task before her if she meant to lead her husband to the Saviour. He did all he could to get the "religious nonsense" out of her, as he used to put it. Coaxing, threatening, ridicule, and all else that promised any hope of success were tried by him for six long, and to the wife, weary years, but all in vain, for Margaret knew in Whom she had believed. He used to say to her sometimes, "I thought this religion was only a bit of nonsense you had in you, and that I should soon get it out, but if I'd thought it would take me so long to do it, I'd never have married you." Not only, however, did Will fail in taking away Margaret's religion, but she succeeded in giving her religion to him. In doing this she owed her success to the grace of God, as she herself would be the first to confess, and to answers to earnest and long-continued prayer; but there were human elements in her success that must not be lost sight of. First, there was her consistency. What a wonderful thing is consistency! No other Christian arsenal can furnish such weapons for the destruction of sin and the removal of obstinate opposition to the truth. So it proved in this instance. Will would say to us sometimes after his conversion, "I never knew my wife to tell a lie, I never saw her in a bad temper, I never heard her say a word that was inconsistent with a Christian profession. And *such* patience! I used to do all I could to vex her, but it was no go; with a few quiet words she would sooth me, and somehow she always got the best of it." Margaret's consistent life was her strongest weapon.



Another important argument in her favour was her determined perseverance in her Christian life. After a long tirade from her husband, she would say, very quietly, "It's no use, Will, I shall never go back." A frail, weakly, delicate woman she was, and to look upon her you would have thought that very little trial and persecution would have overcome her. There was, however, an appearance of resolution in her face, a decision in her quiet voice, and a general aspect of determination in her demeanour, that would have reminded you of the old saying, "If a woman will, she will," or of those saintly martyr faces that look upon us from the paintings of other days. And so it came to pass that, at the end of six years, Will saw his wife more of a Christian than ever, which made him think that religion could not be nonsense after all.

But Margaret's consistency and perseverance in her own Christian life were nobly supported by her earnest and persistent efforts to bring her husband to Jesus. She did not think a silent testimony sufficient. She believed that just as Andrew went after his brother Simon, and did not return until he could bring him to the Saviour, so she must make direct, earnest, and indomitable efforts if she would secure her husband's conversion. And, in humble dependence on Christ, she did it.

By means of her influence and constant exhortations she managed to keep Will at the house of God with a fair degree of regularity, but for a long time could move him no farther. At length, however, a circumstance happened which gave her a great advantage, and which she did not fail to use. Her husband had gone to a "wake," and he and his ungodly relatives were keeping it up with a wonderful degree of jollity, Sunday though it was. But as suddenly as the hand that wrote on the wall

appeared to Belshazzar, the hand of death appeared to them, for while in the midst of their merriment one of them suddenly died. Taking this for a text, Margaret preached her husband many a sermon, and seeing that he was a little shaken in his opposition to religion, followed up her advantage by urging him to go to class. After much objection and hesitation he consented, and one dark winter night crept into the class-room of Brother Stiffman, more like a culprit than an honest man. It was rather an unfortunate class for a young beginner, for though the leader and members were consistent and pious people, they were cold and formal in the extreme. When they rose to sing every one turned the face to the wall, the eyes to the ceiling, and the back to the leader—which strange procedure was meant to assist their devotion ; but whatever it did in that direction, it provoked Will to laughter, and made him say to himself, “Did ever anybody see the like? let me once get out, I’ll never come in again.”

The next Wednesday evening being “service night,” Margaret got her husband with great difficulty to chapel. Of course there were no lights in the country village, and the darkness was so great as almost to be felt. When Will and his wife had nearly reached the chapel, she said to him, “I don’t think I locked the door, Will ; go back and see.” “Yes,” said Will to himself ; “and if I get in the house I’ll stop there.” But when he found himself alone in the dark rooms, he was afraid to stay, and hurried back again as fast as possible. Margaret had, in the meantime, met with the minister who was to conduct the service : and when Will heard them talking, he rightly judged he was the subject of their conversation. When service closed she said to him, “Now, Will, thou must stay, the minister wants to speak to thee.” Stand-

ing outside the chapel in a very sulky mood, he heard, rather than saw, the minister coming, and thought, "Now if I just back into this hedge he'll never see me;" but his manhood got the better of him, and he kept his ground. "O, you want to see me," said the minister. "No," said Will, "I don't; you want to see me, but I'd a deal rather not see you." The conversation so ungraciously begun ended well, however; for the minister went straight at his work, and by God's help did it well. By the time they reached the gate of Will's cottage Will felt so uncomfortable that he said to the minister, "You must not leave me like this; you must come in." The invitation was accepted, and with the Bible in his hand the minister sat down by Will's side, turning to passage after passage, and pointing him to the "Lamb of God." But Will had many difficulties, and the greatest was this:—In a field behind his garden some trees were being cut down, and a few days before he had gone quietly in the dark and gathered some of the light branches for the purpose of "sticking" his peas, and now, wherever he looked, he could see nothing for this "peawood." It seemed to be above the cross, before the cross, around the cross; it obscured the light and shut out the sight of the Saviour's face, and worried him more than enough. At length the minister, not knowing anything of the nature of the conflict within, said, "You must forget the past and not think of the future, and begin *now*; Christ saves *now*." In that moment Will saw it, and took Christ as his atonement for the past and his help for the future; his face was lit up with a perfect sunshine of gladness, and minister, husband, and wife wept and rejoiced, and prayed and sang together. The "peawood" was taken back next morning before daybreak.

Will continued faithful, in due course became useful,

and is now a Methodist local preacher in the Oldringham Circuit.

Not very long after his conversion to God, Will's only child sickened and died. He had just arrived at a most interesting age; the mother's life was bound up in that of the child; and when the little boy was laid to rest she began to sink, and slowly drooped away. But as she lived, so she died—patient, gentle, devoted. For herself she had no fear. With a blending of modest self-depreciation, and jubilant confidence in her Saviour, she passed her last hours, and, if we may say so, seemed to glide into heaven. And at the last—

Not any word did Margaret say,  
But closed her eyes and passed away.

The work she did for Christ, however, is living on, and

Her true heart and loving faith  
God saw, and He remembereth.

The conversion and elevation of "Margitt," her family, and her husband are all due, under God, to Village Methodism.

## CHAPTER IX.

James Trueman.

JAMES TRUEMAN was born in the village of Hightown in the year 1796. He entered the home of his parents within a year of their marriage, and came like a little sunbeam to brighten its darkness. Of this there was great need, for it was dark with shadows of drunkenness, poverty, and sin. Twelve months before the birth of James, Robert Trueman had taken Jane Tidibody to the parish church, and endowed her with all his wordly goods, which consisted of the clothes he wore and a few public-house debts, and after swearing to love and keep her until death did them part, took her home to a little cottage, mainly furnished by Jane's savings. Robert was unsteady. He was a carpenter by trade, and both able and willing to work, but he loved the drink and his drinking companions, and his evil habits were fast wasting his strength, destroying his character, and blighting his prospects in life. But when he made love to Jane he promised her again and again if she would but have him he would be as steady as a rock and as good as gold, and he meant to keep his promise. But he had no religious principles to guide him, and thinking it safe to be a moderate drinker, he soon fell. A very short while after his marriage he joined his old companions, fell into his old habits, and seemed to go the downward course with accelerated speed. As he went on drinking his work was neglected, his poverty increased, he became

savage and brutal in his temper, and long before the little boy was born, the wife had become accustomed to blows, harsh words, and such other unkind treatment as is sometimes inflicted upon the "weaker vessel" by the drunken lords of the creation. The presence of the child seemed for a while to awaken the father's better nature, and oh! how earnestly the poor mother hoped he might be led to break off his evil habits, and begin to care for and to love his home. But her hope was doomed to disappointment, for in a short time he fell more sadly than ever. The babe that nestled in her bosom brought sunshine and gladness to her heart, however, for she now felt she had something to live for, and instead of looking upon her child as a trouble, thanked God for him every day.

To look upon his sweet little face, listen to his innocent prattle, watch him round the house, think of him, work for him, and bless him, were the only delights of her dreary life. But, as the years passed on other children were born in the home, until two sons and four daughters were dependent upon the mother's care. She had to bear the burden almost alone, and nobly did she give herself to her task. And, indeed, there was great need for her to do so, for the husband and father sank deeper and deeper, until no degradation was too low for him to fathom. He worked but little, all he earned he spent in drunkenness and sin, and had it not been for the industry of the mother, father, mother, and children must have perished of want. Day by day through the summer months she might be seen, hoeing in this field or weeding in that, hay-making here or gleaning yonder; by her heavy toil just succeeding in keeping her husband, herself, and her children "off the parish." When James grew old enough he accompanied his mother to her daily tasks, and in walking by her side, playing among

the cowslips or the clover, and taking a nap under the shadow of a friendly hedge, got through the day. But when he was about nine years old his father died. He had been pursuing his usual course at the alehouse, and as he staggered home fell down upon the damp ground in an orchard through which he had to pass, and slept for some hours. As the shades of night fell upon the village he crept quietly home, perfectly sober, wide awake, and looking dreadfully scared. He declared that as he lay sleeping, a withered, ghost-like old man roused him, in a sepulchral voice repeated all the sins of his life, and, after uttering awful warnings and looking unutterable things, vanished away. Finding his wife unwell, he kindled a fire and prepared her some tea, at which act of kindness she was so astonished that she was unable to speak, and could only look her thanks.

The next day, however, he was so ill as to be unable to rise, and in a few days passed away. The horrors of his death-bed must have been great, for traditions in reference to it, in which awful things about devils and brimstone are mixed up, still linger in the village. We suppose he must have died in *delirium tremens*. But whatever might have been the scenes of his death-bed, or his unhappy fate in another world, his death was a blessing to his wife and children. Relieved of his ill-usage and the curse and burden of his presence, the mother could maintain herself and them in comparative comfort and respectability, and for a little time James was sent to school.

Not long, however, would the slender means of his mother enable her to keep him there, and when he was about ten years of age he was sent to work. His first permanent employment was that of serving a stonemason, and one of the first things he did was to carry



mortar for the building of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in his native village. Three or four years previously the Methodists had commenced preaching services in Hightown, first in the open air, and then in a cottage, and God had so greatly blessed them that they were now able to build a chapel. Among the very first attendants upon their ministry were Mrs. Trueman and her little boy. Whether she ever became a member we do not know, but she was impressed for good, and her lad's heart was deeply touched by the power of grace.

As mother and son were now both working, they succeeded in saving a little money, and when James reached his fourteenth year he was apprenticed to a Mr. Atwood, a shoemaker, in the neighbouring city of Faircester. Mr. Atwood was a Methodist, a very godly man, a class-leader, a worker in the Sunday-school, and chapel-keeper of the Northgate Chapel, at which place of worship his apprentice became a regular attendant.

James now entered a golden age of religious privilege; he had the advantage of good, earnest, evangelical preaching in the chapel, sound instruction and pious companionship in the Sunday-school, and the healthy influence and Christian order of a godly home. His employer was not a man of culture, genius, or position, but he possessed some rude originality of thought, strict integrity of life, and great force of Christian character, and was in all respects just such a man as would influence a quick, honest, and intelligent youth. We well remember him in his old days, when his hair had become white, his goodness mellowed by age, and he had attained the dignity of being called "Father Atwood." He was very lame, but never complained of that or aught else; discontent never robbed his heart of glad-

ness or his face of sunshine, nor did any dark shadow ever fall upon his doorstep. His countenance was a picture of peace, his life a reflection of goodness, and he performed his duties as chapel-keeper in such a way as to make you think he must be always quietly repeating to himself the Psalmist's words, "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." The influences of a godly home and an earnest ministry were blessed to the conversion of James, and when about eighteen years of age he took Christ for his portion, and cast in his lot among the Methodists.

From the date of his conversion to God a great improvement was manifest in every way. He was more conscientious in his daily toil, a better servant to his employer, and became a worker in the Christian Church. He possessed good natural abilities, quite above the average, indeed; and these were now earnestly cultivated. His conversion awoke his intellect, aroused whatever of genius there was in him, and braced up all his energies for a noble fight against the evil and for the good; it was, in short, "that thing which turned him and his destinies upwards for evermore." In singing and praying, working and reading, and fulfilling the daily tasks of life, the remaining days of his apprenticeship soon glided away, and when it had ended he removed to the fashionable town of Draperham, in order to "improve" himself. Draperham was—or had it not been for some serious drawbacks would have been—the paradise of drapers, milliners, and fancy repository keepers. Such shops abounded in its fashionable streets and promenades, and half the time of its inhabitants was taken up between worrying milliners, drapers, jewellers, and shopkeepers generally and exhibiting themselves,—or

rather their clothing,—to an admiring public ; while the other half was consumed by sleep, sentimental novels, and “society.” The drawbacks in this happy condition of things were that the fashionables took long credit—some of them when their credit was gone took long journeys—and looked upon shopkeepers and servants as a lower order of beings created by a beneficent Providence for the benefit of the higher spheres.

Well was it for James Trueman that he had gained religious principle before entering the fashionable town of Draperham, otherwise he might have become a mere bauble on the stream of life, or have been swept away by its rushing torrent. As it was he claved to those that believed, and at once joined the Methodist Society, which, at that time, was both vigorous and intelligent. Here his knowledge and piety increased, and his talents were so manifest that he was soon made a local preacher, and eventually nominated by the superintendent minister as a candidate for the ministry. All his examinations were creditably and successfully passed, but, by some unforeseen circumstance—the particulars of which have faded from sight—he was hindered, and henceforth became a man of business. Seeking to improve himself he shortly entered an opening which offered itself in the manufacturing town of Weaverminster, and entered upon a career that was mighty in its power for good.

Mr. Trueman did Christian work of all kinds, held every office in turn, and was for many years the very life of Methodism in Weaverminster, but he excelled as a local preacher and class-leader. In the latter capacity he was eminently successful and popular, having, at times, no less than one hundred members under his care. He was very careful in looking after inquirers and inviting them to class, and was generally successful in

leading them to Christ. Very many young men and women were in this way laid under heavy obligations to him, and many consistent and earnest workers were gained for the cause of Christ. One of these afterwards became one of the most successful soul-winners the Methodist ministry ever had in its ranks. And he, by the way, was born and brought up in a country village.

As a local preacher James rose to the greatest and noblest eminence. In his early days he was popular, but in his prime and later years he was both popular and useful. Not long after he began his work as a preacher he was led by some means to contrast himself and his work with that of an older man upon the same plan. The older man was uncultured, ungrammatical even, not much given to reading, and even less to thinking, and yet he was eminently useful in the villages of his circuit. On the other hand, James was thoughtful, studious and popular; people followed him, but none were led to Christ by him. He therefore determined to hear his less refined but more successful brother, and endeavour to discover the secret. He did so, and came away exclaiming: "The difference is this: he has given *all* his heart to God, while I have only given Him *half* of mine." But before another Sunday arrived, he had given God the other half; the next time he preached some half dozen persons were seeking the Saviour, and henceforth all his energies were devoted to the work of leading souls to Jesus. And though he was quite willing to sacrifice popularity to usefulness, he was not called upon to do so, for his popularity increased, and it was popularity of the best kind. He was sought in other circuits, always considered a good supply for a minister, and wherever he preached, at home or abroad, believers were quickened, sinners awakened, and a savour of good left among the people.

For many years he was highly successful in the town of Weavermminster, and was a power for good thirty or forty miles around it.

But in what is to many men the prime of life he was attacked and broken down by disease, his business had to be given up, and partial retirement from the active duties of life to be sought. He had never forgotten the pleasant village which had been the cradle of his birth and childhood, and it was to that place he now retired. No wonder he selected it as his future home, for beyond the fact that it was his native place, it was one of the most likely to give soothing and health to the weary and sick. It presented to the eye the richest pastures, the greenest fields, the most luxuriant vales, the bonniest hills, and the bluest of skies. Several gentlemen had built their halls and planted their parks there, through which latter pheasants and peacocks roamed at will, while any day

“ You there might spy the fawn at play,  
The hare upon the green.”

The great range of the Sheepswold hills encircled the vale, part of the village ran up their slopes, and from the cottage doors you could obtain such enchanting views of wood and water, hill and dale, corn and pasture land, and hear such singing of birds and sounds of nature as would

“ Drive away dull melancholy,”

unless it had taken very fast hold of you indeed. The late Sidney Dobell, the poet, spent the last years of his life near this village, and was often heard to say that never in “la belle France,” sunny Italy, or anywhere else had he found such delightful scenery. If it were only situated

at the foot of the Alps or the Falls of Niagara, Englishmen would go to see it.

By the pure air and perfect quiet of his native village, added to the blessing of God, Mr. Trueman was in great measure restored, and soon resumed his work. A class was found for him to lead, and ample scope for all his preaching powers was supplied by the plan of the Fairchester Circuit.

As a youth, then residing at an adjacent village, the writer often had the great privilege of listening to his sermons, the greater privilege of hearing his conversations, and sometimes the still greater privilege of receiving his advice.

The people regarded him as the very beau ideal of a local preacher. Sufficiently taught to be able to avoid the use of a single expression that might pain the most refined taste, and yet sufficiently simple to be understood by the most ignorant ; tall, erect, slender, almost wasted, with a fine countenance and a noble head, lips compressed, features well chiselled, and with that refinement upon them that only spirituality and chastened suffering can give, he looked well fitted to convey the message he bore. And then his eye: so piercing, yet so kindly and so full of love, with a look in it that reminded you of something far away—some other world—and which made you feel sure that the soul which looked through it

“ Had sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought it hither ;  
Could in a moment travel thither,  
And see the children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

Add to this a spotless character—if such is possible to man—a deep spirituality of mind, intense love to Christ



and souls, and you have such a man as James Trueman appeared to the village congregations among whom he laboured in his later days, and where he turned "many to righteousness."

Well do we remember hearing him preach one Sunday evening for more than an hour from the text, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. The sermon was full of reason, strength, and unction, and was listened to with breathless attention; the simplest rustic who heard it would have gladly sat another hour. After the service we accompanied him part of the way to his home. The harvest moon shone upon us as we crossed the bare and silent fields, and everything contributed to fill the heart with calm and peace. We have forgotten that night's conversation, lost amid the rush of years the remembrance of the wise words that were doubtless uttered by our venerated friend, but well enough do we remember how, when we were parting from him, he rested his wearied form upon the gate, the look that beautified his countenance, and with what desires to be good and useful the very sight of him filled our hearts. Often, in thinking of it since, have we been reminded of Chateaubriand's words in reference to Washington, "I saw Washington, and it inspired me for life. Happy was I that his look was cast upon me. I have felt warmer for it all my days." Neither could you be in the presence of James Trueman without feeling the inspiration of his life and character, and having some desire to be like him.

When failing health compelled him to desist from the longer journeys, he was often at home on the Sabbath, and attended the services in his own village. At such times he would assist in the Sunday evening prayer-



meeting, and, led out of himself, would exhort the villagers to immediate acceptance of Christ. Oh! the tenderness, the unction, the overwhelming influence of those exhortations; we would hardly begrudge ten years taken out of our life if we could plead with sinners as he did. And then his prayers. Once heard, never to be forgotten. Heaven appeared to enter every heart while he talked with God. He seemed to know instinctively what every one needed, and to ask for that, and, almost always, to obtain it.

One Sabbath evening he was praying after service with more than his usual power, and was led to supplicate for the preacher, a young man well known to him, who had lived all his life in the circuit, and was likely to continue to do so. Mr. Trueman prayed for him long and earnestly, much more so than usual, and at length by name and with great tenderness, "God bless John Thomas." The young man shortly afterwards left his home, quite unexpectedly, for a distant commercial engagement, and he and Mr. Trueman never saw each other again. Was it a coincidence, or are the secrets of the future known to him who lives near to God? Be that as it may, we believe every word of that prayer has been answered.

Mr. Trueman was faithful to God, faithful to Methodism. Agitations and commotions went on around him, but never within him. He came to Hightown just at the time of the last agitation, and found matters in an excited and unsettled state. Had it not been for him, in all probability the society would have been lost, and the congregation scattered, if not the chapel closed. One of the leading spirits in the great movement resided at Hightown, and was deservedly much respected, and consequently had much influence. He had rendered much

able service as a local preacher and otherwise, but his graces were quite equalled by his talents, we fear, and he was, no doubt naturally, pugnacious and easily offended. Mr. Trueman took hold of the society this brother was leaving—or, rather, taking with him—and by judicious care kept it together, while by his Christian forbearance he conciliated all his opponents. No one spoke against him; he had the good word of all. He was no partisan; he had a case, and knew how to defend it, and never, therefore, abused the other side. Thus he lived, and after being a member forty-eight years, and a local preacher forty-four, went to his rest. His life enriched the Church of God, and his memory is a precious heritage to many. He received his all through Village Methodism, and while he paid it what he owed with noble generosity, he conferred still greater blessing, through grace, on the town societies with which he was connected.

Mr. Trueman was never so successful in business as he might have been had he been less devoted to the interests of the Church of God. He laboured with a “zeal above many” for the spiritual Zion, and though he worked hard in business, he did not apply himself so exclusively, nor succeed so largely, as he otherwise might have done. Add to this the fact that he was liberal to a fault. Almost every Christian object received help from his purse, many of the poor among the society were constant pensioners upon his bounty, and ungrudging aid was given to chapel debts, new erections, and extensions of the work of God. One of the last acts of his life was to expend £70 in the erection of a small school, attached to the chapel of his native village. Owing to this all his available means were exhausted before his last illness, and had it not been for the kindness of

friends he would have died in want. But brethren who honoured and loved him ministered to his necessities while living, and bore him to his grave when dead. Long ere this he has mingled on the plains of light with many who probably would not have been there but for his zealous and self-denying labours.

Green be the grass above thee,  
Friend of our bygone days ;  
None knew thee but to love thee,  
Nor named thee but to praise.

## CHAPTER X.

### Westwater.

WESTWATER is a large parish, situated among the lowlands, in the south-west of Green county. It extends over an area of several square miles, and includes many villages. It is well wooded, well watered, and highly cultivated, and supports a large population, mainly engaged in agricultural pursuits. But between sixty and seventy years ago its spiritual interests were sadly neglected, for then (to quote the late Bishop of Carlisle) "the Church of England really seemed as if it followed the worst kind of routine—the routine of being satisfied with doing little, and doing that little ill,"\*—and Nonconformity had not entered the parish. An ancient church stood in the centre of the parish, in which service was held on Sunday mornings. Those who resided near enough to it, or who cared to go, or so many of the parishioners as the place would seat, presented themselves at the weekly gathering, while the others remained away, nobody heeding. And if tradition is to be credited, those who went were not very great gainers. Of heart or enthusiasm there was none, of devotion very little, and had it not been that the Creed named Him, the people would scarcely so much as have heard that there was any Holy Ghost. The one

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\* Preface to *Twelve Sermons Preached in Exeter Hall*. London: Seeley and Co. 1857.

service over, the remaining portion of the day was devoted to work—necessary and unnecessary—and to play. Various places in the parish were noted for the gathering of the people, especially the young, and there the latter half of the Sabbath was spent in playing football and other games, the day seldom closing without a fight.

But at the time of which we write there lived at least one in the place who cared for its spiritual condition, and desired to see good done among the people. This one was a Mrs. May, the wife of a farmer. She had been from home on a visit to friends, had heard the Methodist preachers, and found religion. On returning, she looked around with other eyes than formerly, and desiring to see her neighbours made partakers of "like precious salvation," invited an old Methodist local preacher from a village "across the water" to preach to them. This old gentleman, whose name was Worthington, and who is still remembered by the "oldest inhabitant," paid occasional visits to Westwater on week evenings, preaching to the few people that came to hear, in a corn loft fitted up for the occasion. Success was given, and, as usual, success brought difficulty, for when Sunday services became a necessity, the question arose, how could they be supplied? The difficulty was soon met, however, for Mr. Worthington was connected with Methodism in the little town of Durleyvale, and suggested that the local preachers of that circuit should be asked to conduct the services at Westwater. So said, so done. All honour to those good men. Nothing but zeal of the purest and loftiest character would have brought them on the long and perilous journey. And yet no one who knew Durleyvale would have thought of going *there* for zeal or energy, or to

find men to undertake evangelistic work so dangerous that it might well be spoken of as a forlorn hope. But the fact that Methodism had moved so dead a place, and that it now contained men who were ready to brave all dangers to spread the Gospel, is an illustration of the power it exercised in the by-ways of the land. For, indeed, no power save that which was of God could have moved so quiet a people as those of Durleyvale. Beautifully situated, it lay nestling among the hills, like a pebble set off by diamonds ; but, despite its lovely surroundings, one of the most out-of-the-way, antiquated, immovable, and sleepy places it was ever our fortune to know. You might sometimes have gone down its little street in the summer noon without meeting any sign of life, save such as there might be in a dog lying here and there upon a doorstep, either fast asleep or just in the act of lazily closing his eyes for a nap. Standing under the shadow of the old market-place, you looked up at the statue of Queen Anne, whose stony figure seemed to be as much alive as anybody or anything else you saw. And even more so ; for when the light and shadow fell upon the face in a certain combination, you might have thought her Majesty was smiling, if not actually winking at you, which latter was a thing no Durleyvalian ever did.

All around the town arose the beautiful amphitheatre of hills that seemed to guard it, their sides and summits covered with the green woods. From these there came the occasional note of a bird to break the silence, and high above there was the cloudless sky, and, crowning all, the summer sunshine. But the inhabitants were as still as you would suppose those people to be who lived on the road to "nowhere," and had no intercourse with the busy world. We remember an old gentleman of

our acquaintance telling us that in his youthful days he once drove a carriage into the town—a vehicle that was an uncommon sight in Durleyvale ninety years ago. Roused by the noise of the passing wheels, an old man came to his door, and, seeing the wonderful sight, ran along the street, crying to the neighbours, “E’er, e’er, e’er’s a korridge.”\* Had you stood in the streets of the place any summer’s afternoon, you would have had but little difficulty in imagining yourself in a Spanish town during the siesta, or that you had at last reached that spot, found by one of the Knights of the Round Table,

“ —Where no man was, or had been,  
Since the making of the world.”

Certainly Durleyvale and its surrounding villages would never have been touched by the Methodist revival, had it been guided by any other hand than that of Divine wisdom. Human policy would have said, “Do not go there of all places in the world; the people will never respond, and it will never pay.” And yet it *did* pay. For good was done, the inhabitants were greatly blessed, a large number of conversions took place, a succession of revivals visited the society, and now Durleyvale Methodism flourishes amain. An efficient day-school, a commodious and well-built chapel, a good house as the minister’s residence, and a healthy and vigorous society attest its life. Even now, we fear, it would look decidedly “slow” to a *Manchester* man, but it is greatly improved in every way.

Neither was the good confined to Durleyvale, for some of the most useful, popular, and excellent workmen in the Methodist ministry have come from thence to the

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\* The first pair of springs ever used in Durleyvale is still doing duty there, on a baker’s cart.



wider sphere of ministerial labour, and the villages around have been evangelised by a band of workers as devoted and successful as any ever employed in the Master's vineyard. The case of Westwater is an illustration of this latter point. As already intimated, the journey between it and Durleyvale was long and perilous. In winter the roads were bad and the ways lonely, and if nothing worse than weary limbs, aching bones, and sore feet were the results of the toilsome walk, the brethren had reason to be thankful. But between the two places there was a broad, unnavigable river, and this made the journey one of special trial and danger. The river was very wide—perhaps about a mile—and of uncertain depth. The current was strong and the tides were high; the ferry—or “passage,” as it was called—was often dangerous, and sometimes impassable. To cross this in the dark and stormy nights of winter needed no mean courage, therefore; but the faith and zeal of these men were equal to the demand, though some of them, who never quailed before the shouting or stones of a mob, no doubt felt something very much like fear as the little boat was tossed about in the rushing waters, while they strained their eyes through the darkness to catch sight of the lights scattered here and there upon the land, and wondered if they should ever reach them. Humanly speaking, there was some danger they might not, for the Methodists were much persecuted, and it sometimes happened that their ferryman was by no means their friend. On such occasions they might have been “accidentally” drowned, had it not been that the boatman valued his own life more than he did theirs, and in order to save himself, if not them, did his best to bring the boat to land. So the providence of God watched over them; they were all safely carried to

and fro, while some of the more courageous beguiled the dark journey, and nerved their own hearts, by singing the words of Charles Wesley :—

“ Lord, whom winds and seas obey,  
Guide us through the watery way ;  
In the hollow of Thy hand  
Hide, and bring us safe to land.”

Such labours were crowned with the Divine blessing ; a society was formed, and many were gathered to Christ.

These noble men would, no doubt, have continued their labours, but as there was a circuit town from which Westwater could be more conveniently worked, and the journey to and from which did not necessitate the danger and inconvenience of crossing the river, it was transferred to that circuit, and is an important part of it at the present time.

For a while the preaching services continued to be held in the old corn loft, though in the summer time they were sometimes conducted in more inviting places. A tent was secured, and erected first in one part of the parish, and then in another, and in this way many heard the Word who would not otherwise have done so. Had the reader been permitted to worship among those congregations, he would have been struck with the honest simplicity of the worship and the quiet beauty of the surroundings ; so much so as almost to have fancied himself in some old Arcadia, surrounded by the primitive ways and customs of a pastoral age. The tent was sometimes placed on a little bluff overlooking a long reach of beautiful country. Running from your very feet, down the hill slope, were the orchards of fruit-trees for which Westwater was so noted, full of scented blossom and beauty in the spring time, and laden with shining fruit in the autumn. And far away stretched

the pleasant corn and pasture lands, dotted over with flocks and herds, until the horizon was bounded by the hills of an old forest, which once echoed to the cries of Norman William's huntsmen, and where the Conqueror himself had often followed the chase. And then there was the "crown of beauty" in the noble river, which reflected the clouds or flashed in the sunlight, as it wandered on to the not far distant Bristol Channel, where the white sails of the ships might easily be seen. In such surroundings it seemed natural and easy to worship God, and you did not wonder that one devout worshipper said to another, as they looked around ere they entered the "tabernacle," "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord; and Thy saints shall bless Thee." And at other times the tent was erected in some little dell, filled with the fragrance of wild flowers, and close to the bank of the river, while the songs of Zion rose up on the gentle breezes, and the incense of prayer was wafted to heaven. Wherever it was pitched, however, the people heard, and feared, and "turned to the Lord;" and thus much spiritual good was effected in Westwater.

By the way, might not an itinerating tent be wisely used by our village evangelists of the present day? Thus we should have a movable chapel at the smallest cost, and in any place where God specially blessed us a permanent stand might be made. Which was, in fact, what happened in this case, for so much success was given in one part of the parish, that a site was selected, and the people said, "We will arise and build." In the year 1819 the first Methodist chapel built in Westwater was dedicated to the worship of God, and from that time Methodism has had a "local habitation and a name" in the place.

Both before and after the chapel was opened the work of conversion proceeded graciously, and among those who were brought to Christ were many of the more respectable inhabitants, such as well-to-do farmers and tradesmen. And though the souls of such men are of no more value than those of mechanics and ploughmen, their influence is much greater, and unless some such persons join Methodism, its power in a country village is small. When they do so, however, its influence is great and abiding, and happily such was the case in Westwater.

Fifty years ago there lived a good man,—Captain Irving,—at the village of Allingham, the village in which the Mr. Worthington resided who preached the first Methodist sermon in Westwater. The “Captain” was a man of note in those parts, and had influence with the powers that were in those days, by which he succeeded in obtaining the appointment (for one year) of the Rev. David Cornforth, an earnest, godly, and devoted young minister. His services were to be equally divided between Allingham and Westwater, and, by the blessing of God upon his labours, a revival of religion was brought about at each place. At Westwater the whole parish seemed moved, and many were brought to Christ. The names of many of these have perished from the records of the living, and the majority of them held humble positions in life. But two stood out prominently, both on account of their position and subsequent usefulness. Both of them were truly changed in heart and life, and thenceforth they entered upon paths of usefulness, only destined to close in death—or, rather, to merge into the higher activities of the skies. One became noted as a local preacher. Fortunately he was able to ride his own horse to his appointments; conse-

quently the "super" had no hesitation in "planning" him constantly, and for the longest journeys. Which he most certainly did, and though the horse did not, perhaps, like it, his master never complained. Neither did the people. For the good brother had something to say, he said it, and sat down when he had done. Add to this, great punctuality and faithfulness in attention to his work, the influence of an irreproachable life, and the force of a godly character and loving heart, and we shall feel no surprise that, although many years have passed away since the old local preacher kept his last great appointment in the temple above, his name still lives and his memory is enshrined in many hearts.

The second of these young men became useful in other ways, and, in virtue of his social position and high Christian character, was soon the acknowledged head of the "cause." He neglected no part of the interests of the Church, and happily he was an "all-round" man. Good at a prayer-meeting, good at a collection, good in business affairs, he was one of those men who are the strength and glory of Methodism—and may the race long continue. Though it is half a century since he felt his first love to Christ, its freshness still continues. To-day his influence extends even to those places that are ignorant of his name, and his face beams upon you with that unity of solemnity and sweetness it has worn for fifty years.

In the course of years other revivals of religion cheered the Methodists of Westwater. One of the most remarkable was brought about in a remarkable way. A son of the gentleman above referred to was completing his education at Taunton College. During his residence there a work of God began among the lads, many of whom were saved. One of those who were thus blessed was

this gentleman's son. Filled with the ardent flame of a new life, he wrote an account of it in "words that burn" to his friends at home. The people must have been prepared, "for the thing was done suddenly." The letter fell like fire upon dry stubble. In some instances parents were disturbed by noises in the night, and, on rising to ascertain the cause, found their children praying and weeping together, or making the night musical with songs of praise, going up from newly-liberated hearts. Brothers influenced their sisters, then the work spread to cousins, relatives, and friends, until almost every family in the parish had been more or less blessed; among others, that of a large farmer and tradesman—one of the most respectable and influential men of the place. The husband and wife, two sons and one daughter, were all brought to Christ in the course of a few days. Happy was it for them that the grace of God visited them when it did, for, though they knew it not, clouds of desolating sorrow were gathering over their home. Fever in one of its malignant types entered the house. The mother and one son and one daughter were rapidly swept away. Their religion, however, did not fail them—they were all filled with the peace of Christ, and the mother had a triumphant entrance into the realms of light. While the mother and children were being carried to the grave, the father lay tossing in delirium, for he, too, had been seized by the same dreadful disease, and for some weeks his spirit hovered about the gates of death. Medical skill availed not, and the doctors said there was "no hope." But the Methodists—more especially the young converts—determined to try what virtue there might be in prayer. And they came together, and besought the Lord that He would rebuke the fever and heal the sick. When the prayer-meeting was over they



continued their prayers at home, and thus "prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." And, as of old, it succeeded, and from the "jaws of death" the poor sufferer came back to life. Everybody was thankful, many were astonished, and the family doctor—whose worst enemies would never accuse him of having too much religion—said, "it was a miracle, the prayers of the Methodists saved him."

The life thus mercifully prolonged was given up to usefulness. In due time our good friend became the greatest stay of Methodism in his own village, was eventually made circuit steward of the important circuit in which he resides, and still lives a useful and honoured life.

The results of this revival were manifold and blessed. A new chapel was built in another part of the parish, while a good school-chapel was opened in yet another part. Thus the Methodists have two chapels and one schoolroom, in which preaching services are regularly held, three Sunday-schools, and one well-attended and efficient day-school in this one parish. The day-school especially is of great service to them, as it strengthens their Sunday-schools, enables them to prevent their children's minds from being prejudiced against the religion of their fathers and mothers, and furnishes them with an opportunity of giving an unsectarian, but decidedly religious, education to many not of their own fold. What may, at least in some measure, be claimed as more indirect results are seen in an Independent chapel—built many years ago—and in an earnest clergyman and widely different state of things in connection with the parish church.

In the midst of all this prosperity, the old days of persecution are not forgotten, for they were of a kind to make an impression. The band of roughs who perse-



cuted the Methodists was led on by a number of young men who were maltsters, and who naturally thought, If these Methodists succeed, our craft is in danger. Hence they did their utmost to drive them out of the parish. Numberless acts of annoyance and petty persecution were resorted to; though sometimes these were scarcely of a harmless character, for on one occasion, soon after the chapel was opened, a number of bullets were fired in at the windows on one side, passing through the chapel, and out at the opposite windows, and this while some kind of service was being held.

But all this has long since passed away, and the Methodists of Westwater have hitherto had too much backbone to yield to those more refined and subtle influences which would seek to detach them from the faith of their fathers. The cause has prospered, and still prospers. One of the circuit ministers has taken up his residence in the parish, and, while watching over the interests of Methodism, endeavours to spread the knowledge of Christ among the people generally. Whatever may be the future of Methodism in Westwater, it has already done a noble work. Its influence has been blessed to more than one generation, for whom it has enriched life, and to whom it has opened the gates of the celestial city. And from its humble services men and women have gone to country villages, and to other and wider spheres of Christian work—some to lower and some to higher offices, but all to be useful in the “household of faith.”

## CHAPTER XI.

### "Master Holdfast."

WHICH was the name by which he was known and spoken of among the people of Sunnyhill, the village in which he lived. Some few there were who spoke of him as "Holdfast, the carpenter," while others called him "the Methodist pracher," and yet a few others "*Mister* Holdfast." But these were the exceptions, and among the villagers generally he lived and died as "Master Holdfast."

Master Holdfast was a man of some note in Sunnyhill. He was the village carpenter, doing all the work of that kind required in the village and many miles around it, and, consequently, driving a good business. He farmed a quantity of land, and did it well, and made it pay. He was the parish constable for one term of years, and the parish overseer for another.

He was Methodist class-leader and local preacher ; steward of the society at Sunnyhill, acting trustee of the preaching-room and chapel, and the only man who entertained the Methodist preachers in their visits to the place. He had not always been in that position, of course, and would never have been in it had not Methodism visited his native village, and, in the Providence of God, visited him.

His childhood was rough and little cared for. When quite a child he was sent to an old dame's school, because he was too young to work, and "to be out of

the way." The old dame could not write her own name, and could hardly spell it when written by anybody else. The only book in use in this wonderful seminary for young beginners, in addition to a small spelling-book and the New Testament, was an old-fashioned lesson-book known by the title of "Reading Made Easy," and which the old dame taught her young hopefuls to call the "Reddy Ma' Dasy." When the old lady slept during school hours—which was very often—the youngsters played, and when she was awake, and professedly teaching, they did not employ themselves to much more profit. It is not difficult to imagine what kind of an education two years spent at such an "academy" would give; and at the end of that time young Holdfast had to leave school for work.

He went to Sunday-school, during his early boyhood, at the parish church. The school was taught only once a day, and that for an hour before the afternoon service, which was the only service held. Of teaching there was little, and of discipline none, but of punishments an abundance. One of these was more remarkable for ingenuity than effectiveness. The unlucky culprit was made to stand up in the front of the gallery during the service, and to hold over his head a large Bible. The very picture of such a sight must have been distressingly ludicrous; but that was not the worst part of the business, for it generally happened that in some period of quiet during the conduct of the service the boy's strength of arm failed, and the Bible descended with great force upon the head of some unfortunate member of the congregation below. In a Sunday-school conducted on these principles a lad was scarcely likely to make up for the shortcomings in the training of the day-school. And in the case of young Holdfast there were no pious,

or even moral, examples, nor any gentle or loving influences, at home. His mother, who had at least a loving heart and a gentle voice, died early, leaving him and three other children without the care she alone could bestow. Soon afterwards the father married again, and married a woman who might have sat for the very worst type of stepmother. Her maiden name was Cake, and a very bad cake indeed she was—bad material, badly done. Whether she was baked hard on all sides the young Holdfasts never knew, but they were quite sure she never showed any soft side to them. Blows, hard words, and harsh treatment were liberally bestowed upon them; the only kindness they ever received was to be left alone.

The father was a hard-working, industrious man, but one in whose nature there seemed to be no place for thoughts of God, so utterly dead was he to all the influences of religion. He made constant journeys to the surrounding villages in the prosecution of his business, and was often accompanied by one or other of his lads. Master Holdfast well remembers these journeys. Very often his father was more or less intoxicated on his return home, and sometimes had great difficulty in reaching it, after passing through great dangers on the way. One of the greatest of these was that of being drowned, for more frequently than otherwise the road home lay by the side of a narrow but deep river, which had eventually to be crossed by a narrow plank, unprotected by a guard of any kind. As the father staggered along this dangerous pathway, Master Holdfast crept behind him, and held the tails of his coat with as firm a grasp as his strength would permit, so that he might save him from tumbling head foremost into the river.

With such surroundings who would have thought it possible for a boy to become anything great or good?

And yet—to the wonder and glory of the grace of God—from such unlikely beginnings have often sprung holy and noble lives. So it was here.

In the days of Master Holdfast's childhood the Methodists found their way to his native village, and when in his early teens, he was led to attend their chapel and Sunday-school. Impressions were soon made upon him, and although these passed away, and he became a gay and thoughtless young man, there was ever after a kindly sympathy in his heart towards the things of God. When about twenty-four years of age Master Holdfast was converted to God. His was one of those conversions about which there was not very much smoke, but a great deal of fire. An elder brother had been brought from a life of sin to Christ in a somewhat remarkable and very decided manner. His after-life was so great a contrast to what had preceded it, and his zeal for the souls of others so great, that it drew the greater part of the family within the circle of the Saviour's love. Master Holdfast was one of the first to feel its power. For many months he dwelt beneath the shadow of Sinai, and wandered through the bitter deserts of mournful anguish traversed by those who weep for sin. But at length his eye rested upon Jesus, and his heart trusted in Him. Then the shadows fled away, and for upwards of half a century he walked in the light of salvation.

Almost immediately after his conversion he removed from his native village to Sunnyhill, and one of his first inquiries was, "Are there any Methodists here?" The answer was one not at all likely to cheer a young convert. The Methodists were there, and had been there for forty years; but unless something or somebody interposed, they would not be there for another week. The first Sunday Master Holdfast heard Methodist preaching

in Sunnyhill was to be the last anybody should hear it; for the rent of the hired room in which service was held was not forthcoming, and the Methodists had notice to quit. But Master Holdfast had too much natural enterprise and perseverance, and too much religious zeal, to submit quietly to retreating orders. So during the next week he solicited help from a few friends, and trusting God for what they did not promise, went to the landlord, and took the "room" for another period, making himself responsible for the rent. His trust was honoured, and the amount was always forthcoming. One of the means taken for raising it was that of the yearly "Anniversary." What an institution that "Anniversary" was! The people came on foot, on horseback, and in vehicles of all sorts, shapes, sizes, and patterns, from all the country round, and the Methodism of the entire circuit was represented at Sunnyhill. Master Holdfast's house was open to all comers. There was good cheer, much religious talk, and a little Methodist gossip, good preaching, singing to be heard and remembered, and very fair giving, when you consider how little money finds its way into the pockets of people in the agricultural districts. Thus Methodism at Sunnyhill led to that interchange of thought and widening of sympathy which lifted the heart of the farmer and the peasant alike out of the narrow bounds of their native village, and made them feel that they owed love and duty to all men everywhere—and this has been one of its best fruits wherever it has gone.

Of course, there was always a crowd at such times, so much so that the room was altogether unable to contain it, and the services were generally held in a barn, or in the open air.

But large attendances, good services, and deep religious

influences were not confined to "Anniversary" occasions; they were generally—if not always—vouchsafed to the Methodists of Sunnyhill. Sunday evening congregations especially were almost invariably good; and although the preaching was simple, and the room in which it was given as unpretending as it could well be, we doubt whether Heaven has ever been much nearer to earth than it was on those well-remembered occasions. Many were converted to God, a flourishing society was gathered, and it is scarcely too much to say, that there was not a man or woman in the parish who did not hear the Gospel—at one time or another—in that little room, and who was not benefited by that which he or she heard there. Week-evening services were well attended, and the ministers were welcomed by congregations that would put to shame some we wot of in more pretentious places.

Thus Methodism flourished in Master Holdfast's adopted home, and from it there went out zealous converts who planted it in the regions beyond, or served its interests in distant towns and cities. Immediately after Master Holdfast's conversion he began to seek knowledge, and to improve his mind. Naturally there was much genius in him, which under favourable conditions would have developed itself into something great. And though such conditions never came, yet religion awoke the slumbering fires of his soul, and kindled them into a flame they would not otherwise have attained. He had heard a voice saying, "Thou, too, art a man," and had felt a breath of life which sent his soul "longing towards the sublime heights." His eyes were opened upon a wide domain of thought and life hitherto unknown, and his mind entered into communion with a lofty sphere, unbounded by any horizons save those of death and the impossible. He was one of the most intelligent, widely



informed, and entertaining men we ever knew—always making allowance for the fact that nothing like education or culture was ever bestowed upon him. Village Methodism found him an unconverted ignorant clodhopper, and changed him into an intelligent, respectable, and godly man, while at the same time it found useful employment for the energies it had brought into being. Such a man was evidently qualified for usefulness in a Methodist country circuit, and very early did the discerning “super” suggest Master Holdfast to the local preachers’ meeting as a candidate for their hard but honourable work.

As a local preacher he had abundance of work, and good success. The circuit in which he laboured was one of the largest, one of the hardest, and one of the poorest in the Connexion, and consequently furnished hard work and hard fare for ministers and local preachers alike. The former often walked upwards of one hundred miles, and preached eight times in a week, in addition to all other parts of a minister’s work, and the latter sometimes walked twenty-one miles and preached three times, and often twenty-five miles and preached twice on the Lord’s Day. Master Holdfast had his full share of this work, but as God so far prospered him that he was able to keep a horse, he could ride to his appointments, and fared better than his brethren.

Some idea of the immense toil of the circuit may be gained from the fact that one young minister, who came to it as his first appointment, after working in it a fortnight, actually ran away. A thing from which an earnest young Methodist preacher runs away, must be bad. This young brother was, however, persuaded to come back; he did his duty with great faithfulness and success, and left the circuit with a fragrant name.

In the midst of these toils there were sweet recompenses.

Master Holdfast often spoke of them with great delight. He, with others, was especially successful on that part of the circuit called the "Round," which consisted of three houses, equi-distant from each other, in which the Sunday evening services itinerated. A wonderful work of God broke out in connection with this place, the fruits of which still remain, and over which our pen would fain linger. Every Sunday night for many months from half a dozen to a score of persons were seeking the Saviour, until the whole country side was moved, and the report and influence of the work had spread throughout the wide circuit. The "Longrainge Hill fire"—as the good work was called—is not forgotten yet. Blessed fire it was, judging from its results. One man who had been a notorious prize-fighter, drinker, and bully, and who had one of the most wretched homes any man could have, was caught in this fire. For some reason he had an especial dislike to Master Holdfast, and went one Sunday night when he was preaching, with the avowed determination of "thrashing" him. But God made the wrath of man to praise Him, and this wild sinner became as a little child. His sins were consumed, his evil habits purged away, and he became a decided and consistent Christian, and eventually a local preacher. His wife and children afterwards found religion, and so rejoiced were they with the change in their circumstances brought about by it, that they would have "plucked out their eyes," and given them to the men who had been the instruments of their good. Years afterwards, Master Holdfast received a present from the family, directed to "The man of God, Sunnyhill."

Among others who were brought to Christ, was an old woman, who was in her *one-hundred-and-first year* when she heard her first Gospel sermon. She was active and

healthy, in full possession of all her faculties, and would have been a mine of wealth to any local historian. When the Pretender was raising the rebellion in Scotland she was just leaving her cradle, when Wesley died she was in her prime, when George the Fourth was in the midst of his brilliant wickedness she was an old woman, and when Queen Victoria was crowned she was still out of her grave; thus connecting in one life what appear to us widely distant events. But, of all her long years, the best and brightest came last. In her case there was indeed "light at eventide." For some years she met in the Methodist class-meeting, and was happy in God. Her one-hundred-and-fourth birthday was kept by the Methodists around, who met to celebrate it, and to rejoice over such a miracle of nature as that which brought human life to so unwonted a length, and such a miracle of grace as that which had brought a woman to Christ in her one-hundred-and-first year. Shortly afterwards she walked with feeble footsteps, but with a joyful heart, into the presence of her Lord.

Extremes met in the work of God at the "Round." The shrill treble in which the old women sang their praises was mingled with the sweet tones of the young ones, and both were set off by the deep bass notes of the young men; for people of all ages were brought to Christ. Many of these still live, while some have "fallen on sleep." The happy oblivion in which they lived shall not be disturbed by us, farther than to say, that many of the young converts became useful, while one young man was especially so—holding the offices of class-leader, society steward, local preacher, and circuit steward for many years.

We would gladly say nothing here of Master Holdfast's "spiritual pastors and masters," but as we are writing

faithful descriptions of what really took place, we cannot leave them out of the account ; and as he was a good target, he always came into somewhat prominent relationship with them, either friendly or otherwise.

Three gentlemen have held the cure of souls at Sunnyhill since Master Holdfast went to reside there. The first was an aristocrat, an autocrat, and a wealthy man. Some said he was related to at least three lords and a duke, while others affirmed that he was first cousin to the bishop of his diocese. That matter, we think, was never satisfactorily cleared up, but we are sure he acted with as much assurance and authority as though he had been related to every ducal house in the country, and the entire bench of bishops to boot. His clerk kept a shop, which was open all day Sunday—excepting “church hours”—and the rector’s household furnished the best Sunday customers. This gentleman sometimes treated the Methodists with perfect indifference, and sometimes did his best to frown them down.

On one occasion he and some members of his family walked up to an open-air service the Methodists were holding. The “super” was preaching from the words, “Now I say unto you, refrain from these men,” &c. But though he had Bradburn’s text he lacked Bradburn’s courage,\* and when he saw the haughty frown of the aristocratic parson he closed the service. The shepherd being “scared,” the people might well be, and he and they crept quietly home. The clergyman, however, had an honest English heart, and was eventually quite won over by the sturdy independence and thorough consistency of Master Holdfast, whom he learned greatly to respect—so much so, indeed, as to send £13 to a family

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\* See Blanshard’s *Life of Bradburn*, p. 242. London : 1870.

in difficulties, merely at his request, he himself knowing nothing of the case. Both the clerk and his wife were converted, and joined the Methodist society, and the shop was ever afterwards closed on the Sabbath-day.

The old clergyman died, and was succeeded by the Rev. Aniway Gudenature. So long as seed-time and harvest, quarter-days and church tithes, succeeded each other in an orderly and regular manner, Mr. Gudenature was quite content, and, at least, so far succeeded in his sacred calling as to live peaceably with all men. He treated the Methodists with easy indifference, and allowed them and all else in the parish to please themselves. More than once he lent the forms of the Church-school to the Methodists, for a tea-meeting. But his tranquil reign soon terminated, and his successor was a man of another pattern. Just fresh from the very tightest Oxford press, he came to the parish full of zeal—and himself. He found the church almost empty, and the school languishing. Very much to his mortification, no funds were forthcoming sufficient to work it, and the parish was appealed to for a rate. The rate was granted, and the people took the course thus opened to them, and elected a portion of the committee of management. Master Holdfast was sent up by an overwhelming majority, and there, as elsewhere, he held fast to his Methodist convictions, and—so far as he could—ruthlessly put down all attempts to make the school the tool of party interests. In doing this he found abundance of work.

Before the minister had been long in the parish he paid Master Holdfast a visit, and requested to be informed why he neglected his parish church and upheld schism? We would gladly give an account of this interview if space would permit. Suffice it to say, however, that the parish priest—as he called himself—got such full infor-

mation that he has not since wanted any more on the same subject.

Master Holdfast now sleeps beneath the shadow of the church where he assisted in placing the dust of so many of the Methodists of Sunnyhill who went before him to the skies. He lived a blameless life, witnessed a good confession, laboured hard for Christ, and held fast until death relaxed his hold. Shortcomings he had, and imperfections beset him, but may we not say that "whatever dark spots of human frailty may have adhered to such a character, they are entirely hid in the splendour of his many bright qualities and Christian virtues, that threw a glory over the obscure place in which he lived?"

"Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, be the glory."

## CHAPTER XII.

### "Cockle Jack."

WHEN the last census was taken, a peculiar difficulty arose in one of the fishing villages on the north-west coast. One of the fishermen had returned under the head of occupation, "gosakoklin." All the local ingenuity and talent were expended in vain, for no man—or woman—could suggest any explanation, or discover the strange and hidden meaning of the term by which the fisherman had described his calling. But upon cross-questioning the writer it was discovered that he spent his days—or nights—in searching for cockles and mussels, and had described his profession in language more remarkable for brevity than elegance or clearness.

To the great household of those who "goakoklin" did Cockle Jack belong, but to a different department of it to that of the hero of the census-paper. For while the former lived by the sea, and employed himself in gathering the cockles and mussels from their native beds, the latter lived in a large manufacturing village remote from the ocean, and employed himself in selling them—either hawking them about in his donkey-cart or wheelbarrow, or dispensing them over the counter of his little shop.

Where Cockle Jack first saw the light of the sun we do not know, but we first saw him in the village of Roughtown; and in that village he first saw the light of Gospel truth.



Methodism had been in this village for a century before the time of which we write. Eighty years ago it had a strong hold upon the place, and flourished famously—so much so indeed as to be the established religion in everything but in name. But the troubles of '97 came, and the trustees sympathised so thoroughly with Mr. Kilham and his associates that they succeeded in carrying the chapel—and the great majority of the congregation—over to them. A few of the members, however, remained faithful to the "old body," and henceforward held their services, and met the class, in a cottage. For some years the cause was so low that no attempt was made to build a chapel, but at length an effort was put forth, and late in the year 1826 a small one was opened by Doctor Bunting. The members rejoiced greatly, and the day of their chapel-opening was a red-letter day to them, no doubt, but their days of weakness had not yet passed away, and the chapel they had built did not inspire the worshippers with much veneration, or the villagers with much respect. It was small, inconvenient, and decidedly ugly, and was generally spoken of by the village wits as "th' owd pigen cote." With such a chapel no very great progress could be made, and the society and congregation at Roughtown continued small and feeble—so much so indeed that the people of the place always distinguished the old Methodists from the new by speaking of them rather contemptuously as "th' owd twelve;" while at the quarterly meeting of the circuit the question was very often asked, in a despairing way, "What *can* be done with Roughtown?" At length it was suggested, as a kind of forlorn hope, that a home missionary minister should be asked for, and—although it was regarded as a

bold and desperate thing—it was resolved to try it. Consequently the missionary was asked for and granted, and almost directly upon the commencement of his mission a revival of the work of God broke out. The old chapel was too small now ; a public hall was taken for Sunday services, and was often full to overflowing. Many sinners, both old and young, were converted to God, and in a short time the society was increased fivefold. A new chapel and school were built, and for the first time since '97 "th' owd twelve" held up their heads.

It would be a pleasing thing to linger over the story of this revival, and to tell of cases which signally displayed the grace of God. Pigeon-flyers and dog-racers, drunkards and Sabbath-breakers, were turned from their evil ways, and large numbers of young people were brought to Christ, and thus saved from following the evil examples of their parents. But our business now is with Cockle Jack.

When he was converted to God he was about forty-five years of age. In his early youth he had seen some glimpses of good, and had been for a short time connected with the Sunday-school. But that had all passed away "like the morning cloud and the early dew," and for eight-and-twenty or thirty years he had been lost to all good things. Not that anybody disliked him—rather the reverse. There was nothing malicious in his disposition, nothing morose or gloomy about him. He was by nature kindly and merry, and with a good temper, carried a pleasant face, and gave everybody a pleasant word. He had a constitution entirely free from all ill-health or morbid humours, a constant flow of animal spirits, a strong vein of pleasantry, and abundance of ready wit. His face was like a full moon in cloudless

good-humour, and his sudden appearance in any place came upon it like a burst of sunshine. And in short he was one of those pleasant figure-heads which the devil often manages to exhibit as a sample of his subjects, and which—while they put to shame the gloomy aspect of some Christians who make it a point of conscience to look as solemn as owls—make the unconverted, especially the young, think that Satan's service is, after all, no unpleasant thing. But if he injured no one else, he made up for it in the injury he inflicted upon himself. As the villagers used to say, "the worst harm was to hisself," and, they might have added, to his family.

His whole life was one of sin. Blasphemy, filthy conversation, Sabbath-breaking, and general godlessness of life and heart, were notorious in him. But the very head and front of his offending, the bitter root from which most of his sin and misery came, was drunkenness. Cockle Jack was a drunkard. Sunday and weekday he entered almost every public-house he met with on his way, and, unfortunately for such as he, the enlightened and Christian people of England have taken care to provide them in large numbers everywhere, so that all drunkards have ample opportunity of making an easy and rapid journey to perdition. As he went his rounds the public-house door stood invitingly open at almost every turn, and the fumes of the drink he loved so well greeted him with irresistible force. Consequently he was often found in the general drinking-room of the "Green Man," or the "Old House at Home," not to speak of the many hasty shakes he had with the paw of the "Bear," or the many "little drops" he gathered from the dripping wings of the "Eagle." And in bar and taproom alike his face was the most jovial, his laugh the most merry, and his joke the most racy of all. Add

to this that he always "paid down" for whatever he had, that he would spend freely—sometimes even running through two sovereigns at one sitting—and you may be sure that the landlords of the public-houses welcomed him, and took his money without making any very particular inquiries after the health and comfort of his wife and children.

He would say, in answer to an inquiry made after his conversion, as to his former life, "Did I often get drunk and very drunk, do you say? Well, I won't say as I did. But I used to drink so much and so long that many a time when I've bin comin' out o' th' Uvvermill (a neighbouring village), I've been lay all along in my cart quite helpless, and the people have had to pour six bucketsful o' water on me afore they could bring me round." Most of our readers will no doubt regard that as an admission of drunkenness; so did Cockle Jack, but he put it in his own way. And let them imagine the kind of picture such a man would present to his family—very drunk, very dirty, wet through to the skin, and carrying an intolerable odour of stale fish! And then let them imagine, if they can, the moral degradation of such a life, and the effect of it in any home. Cockle Jack's wife stood in awe of him, and his children ran away from him; bedroom, coalhole, cellar, back yard, or the chimney itself, if they could have got into it, would have been preferable to the presence of their own father. Can we imagine anything worse than for a child to be afraid to hear the footstep of its own parent?

We once heard him say in a lovefeast, "The minister was talkin' this mornin' about the marks bein' left after the sins was gone. Friends, I knows what that means. God have pardoned my sins, but they've left their marks.

And the worst is this—that I was converted too late to be any use to my children, or leastways as much as I might ha' bin. Most on 'em is growed up, and they had the worst example from me while they was doin' so. I shud like to do 'em good, but I'm afeard it's too late." And while he spoke the big tears followed each other down his face, and when he sat down, overcome with emotion, the people wept for the father who was converted too late to bless his children.

Nevertheless, his home was not entirely without good influences. His wife had always retained her love for religious services, and had attended the little Methodist chapel for many years, and when the revival of which we have spoken took place she and one of her daughters were among the first converts. But the husband still remained untouched, and though he did not persecute his wife and daughter, he made all kinds of ridicule of them and their religion, and sometimes talked to them, and of them, in a most insulting way. But, joining their prayers to those of others, they looked on with hope to the day of his conversion, which they believed would certainly come. And come it did.

The first revival that visited the village of Rough-town in connection with the mission work done there had passed away. Its blessed effects, however, remained, and about three years afterwards the friends were holding special services, and praying for another visitation of Divine power. Prayer was answered, and souls were brought to Christ. One Sunday evening Cockle Jack was among the worshippers, and, while so rare an event filled everybody with wonder, it filled some with hope. The next morning the minister called to see him, and, finding the strong man really broken down, prayed and talked with him, and invited him to come to the remain-

ing services. The invitation was accepted, and that night he was in the congregation. The week evening services were still held in the little chapel, and Jack got as far away from the pulpit as he could, settling himself in the farthest corner of the farthest pew. But even there God could work upon his heart, and as soon as the sermon was over and the prayer-meeting began, he trembled violently. He fought hard against it, but it was of no use; he was fairly laid hold of, and yield he must. In a few minutes he nervously opened the pew-door, and, without being invited by anybody, came and cast himself down before a form in front of the pulpit, exclaiming amid tears and sobs, "Friends, pray for me." He *was* prayed for. What a glad scene it was. There was too much holy feeling to admit of very much noise, but none the less deep were the joy and thankfulness that filled each heart, and none the less real were the praises that trembled on every lip. Jack "found peace," and kept it,—and purity, and lived it.

Very much might be said about his subsequent career, about his altered life, his consistency, his changed home, and his Christian usefulness. But we will only speak of two things. First, his work for Christ. He became a worker in every way. He signed the Temperance pledge, and actively employed himself in connection with the Band of Hope. He was made a teacher in the Sunday-school, and taught gladly and efficiently the lowest class. And if you wanted some one to carry tracts and invitations to the worst part of the village, he was the man to do it, entering those old haunts of his former days with modest boldness and with good effect.

And, secondly, his benevolence. When the minister met his class in the quarterly visitation, he was very much surprised to find this hawker of fish putting down



five shillings for his ticket, and threepence as his weekly contribution. Next to him sat a prosperous tradesman, with a good house and a large block of valuable property, who gave half-a-crown quarterly, and one penny weekly. It is to be hoped this brother made the most of his opportunities of sitting by Jack in the class-meeting, for, surely, he will never be near him in Heaven.

On one occasion some services were approaching at which the friends wished to make a good collection, and a preparatory meeting was held. Many who were better off than Cockle Jack were promising to give ten shillings, when he stepped forward and said, "Now you rich men have done promising, I'll give my mite; please put me down for two pounds. And if I gave as God has given to me, I should give all I have." Thus he gave liberally to the Church of God, while he was one of the best helpers of the poor we ever knew.

But he is Cockle Jack no longer. His old name went with his old life. His right name—Abraham Townley—is altogether too long for use in a Lancashire cotton village, but on week-days, when driving his donkey or pony and selling his fish, he is either John or "Abrum;" and on Sundays, with his clean face, silk hat, and black coat, he is Mr. Townley. Long may he live, and long, too, may be the life of those instrumentalities that were used by the Providence of God for his restoration to a pure, respectable, and godly life. Had Methodism never been planted in the village of Rough-town, or had its friends and supporters failed to stand by it when in its days of weakness, a vast quantity of good must have remained undone, and we could never have told the story of Cockle Jack.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### *A Village Lad, and What He Became.*

HE was born in a country village, situated in a district described by a recent correspondent as a "constantly changing paradise." In hill and dale, pleasant meadow and running brook, pasture lands and corn-fields, cottages and farmsteads, it offered a pleasing variety to the eye, and, touched into different hues by the changing seasons, presented itself to the beholder under aspects new and beautiful through all the changing year.

If, however, the onlooker turned his well-pleased vision from the natural to the moral or spiritual prospect, an entire change met his view. Religion was little regarded ; only the most scant respect was paid to its outward forms, and the people were utter strangers to its power. Irreligion and vice, drunkenness and profanity, prevailed more largely in this village than in the generality of English villages a century since ; and English villages generally were in a sad condition at that time.

But, one summer afternoon, about ninety years ago, two men—who were strangers to the village—might have been seen walking down its street. They were decently but somewhat humbly clad, and as they passed along they spoke to the idlers on the road-side, and called at the houses, inviting the people to a service they were about to hold beneath the shadow of a patriarchal tree on the village green. Conjecture and inquiry were freely in-

dulged in, and soon it began to be whispered that the Methodists were come. Not that the people generally attached any definite idea to the term ; they only knew that these were the folks everywhere spoken against. For, with the exception of some few of the better-informed, the inhabitants of this village were much in the condition of a celebrated town crier of whom we have heard. Being instructed to inform the people that two Wesleyan preachers would preach at such an hour, he reasoned thus : " There is no sense in this. I never heard of Wesleyans. I have heard of Wales, and of lions, and there may be Welsh lions, and there may be men who exhibit them and preach about them, and that must be what it means." So he cried around the town the remarkable notice that "two Welshlion prachers would prach at seven o'clock."

With almost as much wonder as though such an announcement had been made, did the people of Sleepington stare at the two "locals" who preached them their first Methodist sermon, under the old tree, on that summer afternoon, so long ago.

The Methodists met with a warm reception in their early visits to this village. In the majority who heard that first sermon, the most bitter hostility to the Gospel was raised, and very resolute and active persecution was set on foot. Hooting after the preachers, throwing hard things at them with the tongue, and harder things with the hand, interrupting the service and dispersing the congregation, ringing the church bells in order to drown the voice of the speaker, and other things of the like disturbing kind, were freely resorted to. But they nobly persevered, and the hard usage to which they were exposed at last raised them a friend in an unexpected quarter. For—either moved by a secret love for the truth, a noble

generosity, or admiration at the gallant conduct of these devoted men—a respectable farmer, who was very decided in his Church views, offered them a shelter and a home. The farmer who showed them this act of kindness reaped a substantial reward. His wife became a decided Christian, and after adorning her profession for many years, departed this life in faith and hope. His only son was early brought to Christ, became an able local preacher, was made circuit steward, and in fulfilling various offices in the Church, and serving Christ in many ways, lived to a good old age, and died in peace. His wife was a devoted Methodist, and a Christian lady of great influence. Through life she has been a “succourer of many,” and her house is still the home of those who bring “glad tidings of the Gospel of peace.”

The old farmer himself never joined the Methodists; but his life was lifted into a purer region by their instrumentalities, and he was not without hope in his death.

For a long while all the services were held in the open air, but in process of time a young farmer was converted, and one of the firstfruits of his conversion was the opening of his house for the Methodist services. This was a great improvement, though Satan still raged, and persecution was freely resorted to. Village wits exhausted their ingenuity in designing, and village roughs their strength and patience in carrying out, annoyances upon the little band of worshippers.

Sometimes the door was securely fastened on the outside, while the people were quietly worshipping within, and at the close of the service some brother had to venture out through the window in order to remove the fastenings and liberate the prisoners. At other times the roughs would climb to the top of the house, and by some means stop up the chimney, thus

filling the room with smoke, which of course brought the service to a speedy and undignified close ; while at another time a hen was taken up and forced down the chimney, carrying with her such a quantity of soot as would more than suffice to spoil the sisters' bonnets, and making noise and cackle enough to disturb a Stoic, or drown the voice of the stoutest preacher.

"Why endure these things?" says a modern. And our answer is, because wisdom—and oftentimes a greater than wisdom, viz., necessity—said, "Abide and endure." Resistance, in any lawful way, would have been almost certain to fail, and unlawful resistance—whether a success or a failure—would have been a great mistake. So the Methodist sisters cleaned the soot off their bonnets, and the Methodist brothers kept their tempers—and prayed for their persecutors. And the issue showed their wisdom. Earnest work, constant prayer, and patient, uncomplaining endurance of evil brought their own results—God's blessing was upon His people, and many signs and wonders followed the preaching of the Word.

Again and again was the village visited by revivals of religion. And although many of those who were "brought in" in those early days have "fallen on sleep," some remain, and the good effects will abide in undying influences evermore.

As one result of success, the farmer's kitchen was forsaken for a commodious chapel. The farmer, however, who first opened his house for the Methodist services, was amply repaid. He himself was richly blessed, and became a useful local preacher and office-bearer. His character was so pure as to be almost, if not quite, blameless ; and one who knew him well, and had a very large Christian acquaintance, said of him, "He was the holiest man I ever knew." The influence of such a life

would be of incalculable advantage to the cause of Christ ; and his earnest work and blameless career did more to extend its influence than all else combined. He "commanded his children and his household " after him. His wife was a helpmate, his children were early converted, and in almost every case have remained true to Christ and the Church of their father. One of them became a surgeon of great respectability, and remained faithful to Methodism through a long life. Two others entered into a large commercial enterprise in the most important business centre of the north of England, became men of considerable position and means, and to this day continue to live lives of great integrity, usefulness, and extensive influence, still retaining their connection with the Church that led their father to Christ in an obscure country village. But our present story runs—if that can be said to run which loiters so inexcusably—in connection with the lad to whom reference is made at the head of this chapter.

He had been brought up to a regular attendance at the Methodist Sunday-school and chapel, and when quite a youth was deeply convinced of sin. And although he was but a youth, and could never, therefore, have gone far into evil, his convictions were deep and dreadful. His was old-fashioned conviction, and it led to an old-fashioned conversion. He saw the flame, and looked upon the wrath-flashing clouds of God's anger against sin ; the thunder pealed around him with its threatening voices, and the heavens bent over him with their lurid hues ; while in the depths of his spirit he felt "Woe is me !" and trembled with a very great trembling. But when the heavens *did* clear, what brightness there was in the sky ! The terrible storm formed a background which relieved and set off the Divine calm that followed it, and just in proportion to

the stern ghastliness of the one was the blessed light and peace of the other—bright sunshine glancing upon the tear-drops the shower had left, and painting the earth with the beauties it never wears save in sunshine after rain.

Well does the village lad remember all the details of that time. For weeks he sought the face of Jesus, but found it hidden by the clouds. One evening, however, he and a youth who had just found the Saviour, sallied out after the prayer-meeting into the fields, there to renew their wrestlings with Heaven. The spot they selected was beneath a long row of noble trees, and the time "about the lovely close of a warm summer day." There they knelt and prayed. The bright azure above, the evening zephyrs playing around, the green earth, the last songs of the birds dying into the summer night, and all the sights and sounds of nature, made a gorgeous Temple, and a sublime "evensong." No human being was near, but—as when Jacob prayed—angels ascended and descended, and God Himself came down to bless. Can we not, even yet, listen across the silent years to the voices of these youths? Is there not a meaning in them even to us? They felt that the supreme crisis was upon them, and that now they must decide the infinite question, whether it shall be God and light or Satan and darkness,—heaven or hell for evermore. And by God's grace it was decided; and there, beneath the trees in the summer gloaming, they saw the face of a reconciled Father, and, touching His right hand in the darkness, were comforted. And then they tell us the old story, that when they rose up conscious of the blessing of pardon, the trees, the sky, the evening stars, the valleys and the hills were robed in a brightness they had never worn before. But surely there is nothing wonderful in



that—the difference was in them ; they now looked with other eyes, and hence they saw “ the light that never was on sea or land.” “ Behold, I make all things new.” The “ new heavens and new earth ” are realities of the present time to a saved man.

Among other fruits of this revival was the conversion of an Excise officer who had retired to the village. He had attended the public services at the chapel for a considerable time, and had felt himself greatly annoyed by some of the people who were in the habit of responding during the service. When, however, he became converted, he began to respond as earnestly and frequently as anybody. He now joined the two youths in agreeing to pray at chapel and at home for a still larger outpouring of the Divine Spirit. God heard their cry, and the most blessed results followed. The whole village was stirred, and large numbers of the people were led to Christ. Just as when the atmosphere is charged with electricity, no man can tell when it may strike, so it was here. Displays of saving grace and convincing power were not confined to religious services. On the highways and in the lanes, in the houses and in the fields, people were crying for salvation, until the whole village seemed to be filled with the converting power of God. The most unlikely were often struck down first, and the Methodists themselves were astonished at the wonders they saw. And yet, what is this but primitive Christianity, and what we ought to expect to-day ? Tertullian and Origen account for the wonderful increase and spread of Christianity in their times, by stating that influxes of Divine power were borne in upon men and women from above, in an unexplainable manner, while they were in the house or behind the plough. And thus more advance was made



than human effort could have effected, or than human wisdom could account for.

In this way the work of God was extended in this village, and in this way, we believe, we may expect to see it extended everywhere. But as the restless years passed on they brought changes to the quiet village as elsewhere, and the village lad was soon removed to a large commercial centre.

Here he found himself alone, among one hundred and fifty thousand people—a stranger in a strange land. We shudder as we ask the question, what might have been his fate among the temptations of this great city, had it not been for village Methodism? We can only answer it by diving into the “dens and hells” of our large cities, and looking with tearful eyes and saddened hearts upon the dreadful wrecks of humanity we see there, many of whom were once bonny village lads and lasses, as bright and sweet as the flowers that one time bloomed before their mother’s cottage-door. Had not our young friend been brought to Christ before leaving his home, such fate might have been his. As it was, however, God preserved him, and his destiny was far otherwise. At the close of his first day’s labour, he made his way two miles across the city to the home of the only people he knew—a Methodist family he had been acquainted with in former days.

On reaching the house, he found his friend had gone to his class, and immediately followed him, that night enrolling his name among the people of God. Thus he became at once established among friends, and surrounded by Divine hedges of blessing and privilege, which not only guarded him from the foe, but furnished opportunities of growth and usefulness. These were happily employed, and he has lived—and still lives—one

of the most successful and useful lives it has ever been our happiness to witness.

We can do it but scant justice. For just as you cannot tabulate the usefulness of shower or sunshine, neither can you, in pen and ink statements, estimate the power of an earnest and widely extended Christian life. So our readers must allow their imaginations to fill up the picture we so roughly outline.

Our village lad became very successful as a class-leader. When the leader of the class he entered, on the evening of his first day in the large city, had to be superannuated in consequence of age and infirmity, he was made his successor. The class grew until it was so large that a division had to be made. The second part soon became as large as the first; and this, notwithstanding the fact that many leaders for other classes had been furnished by it, and still our friend remains the leader of both.

He has also been very distinguished as a local preacher, rendering in this department of work most efficient service. In his own circuit his services are much appreciated, and in its fine chapels city merchants and men of great culture and intelligence often sit at the feet of the sometime village lad; while for a space of thirty or forty miles around, his pulpit services are in constant exercise; and certainly there are not many local preachers in the kingdom who have done more work—and done it better—than he has.

Of "Sundays at Home" he has none, save such as he may purchase from the bookseller; but of Sundays with God he has as large a share as most men.

Of various offices in his own circuit, he has taken his full share, having filled every office open to laymen—and that in one of the most important circuits of Methodism.

And when a movement was set on foot for the purpose of evangelising the masses of the large city in which he lived, he was one of its most earnest advocates—and what is far more, one of its most practical and active supporters—and is now its lay secretary.

But, if it be possible, all these activities have been surpassed in far-reaching usefulness by a theological class for young men, which he has conducted for the past twenty years. Its plan has been simple but effective. No “high” subjects have been attempted. Neither “conservation of force” nor “sweetness and light” have been in its programme; there has simply been an unpretending effort to give young men an intelligent “grip” of the “things most surely believed” among us, and to ground them in Methodist theology. The class has been very popular, and very successful. Young men residing within several miles of it have gladly availed themselves of it, and as our friend has not been compelled to strike his tent every three years, he has carried the work on steadily year by year. Upwards of *two hundred* young men have passed through it, the great majority of whom are engaged in the various departments of Christian work to-day, and more than twenty of whom are engaged in the Methodist ministry, at home or abroad. In the spice groves of Ceylon, on the shores of Lake Ontario, on the plains of Eastern British America, in the settlements and cities of New Zealand or Australia, and in English circuits, are found many active and earnest workers who, in all probability, would never have been there but for the theological class, so ably conducted by this once village lad. God has blessed him in material things likewise, so that as the shadows deepen somewhat, he can afford to live in comparative ease in the suburbs of the city in which he spent his noonday of toil.

And so we close this hasty summary of a good life. "But why tell it?" Not for the glory of man—neither the writer of the sketch, nor certainly the subject of it, desires that—but for the glory of God, and as one more good thing, rescued from darkness and oblivion, to be placed—under the Most High—to the credit of Village Methodism.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### How the Methodists Stopped the Wake.

“ Not once or twice in our rough island story  
The path of duty was the way to glory.”—TENNYSON.

ALMOST from time immemorial the village of Riversdale had been noted for its wake. It was held in Whit-week, in a large field upon the banks of the Severn. In what it originated we cannot say. But however it originated, there it was, an old and deeply-rooted institution, and a great scandal to the entire district.

The day of the wake was Wednesday, but on the Sunday previous Riversdale began to assume a lively aspect. Friends and visitors, especially the looser kind, came in from far and near, and the alehouses were unusually busy. The excitement went on increasing until Wednesday, on which day it reached its highest point, and then slowly receded, not, however, completely subsiding until the following Sunday night.

Whatever good there may have been in such gatherings as these in the olden time, when rich and poor met together in them, there certainly was no good in the Riversdale wake as it was conducted forty years ago. There was a great deal of hearty fun and innocent merriment about it, but it was mixed up with so much that was questionable, and with some things so decidedly bad, that the little good was entirely swamped by the abounding evil. Let us take a look at it.

It is a beautiful morning in the "merry month of May." Some of the people have already arrived, but not so many as to prevent our taking a good view of the surroundings. How green the grass is—not long, but fresh and delicate, yielding to the foot like the softest velvet. Here in the open space where the games are generally played, it is flooded with the brightest sunshine, while yonder, among the trees, it lies in mingled light and shadow. And these orchards around, how beautiful they look! The very atmosphere, too, is loaded with fragrance. The apple blossom mingles its delicate perfumes with the "May" upon the hawthorn bushes, while both are combined with the stronger scent that comes from the wild flowers beneath our feet, or the primroses upon the river's bank. Yes, just glance at that river—broad, rolling, beautiful, free—how its waters glitter in the morning sunshine. We cannot see far up it, for a little way above us it comes sweeping round a corner between two orchards of fruit trees in full bloom, and looking not unlike a huge dewdrop falling from a gigantic apple blossom. Neither can we see far down it, for half a mile below us it takes a sudden turn, and is lost to view. But just at that point the sun shines upon it in all his glory, making it appear like a silver stream gliding into a golden sky. And then the songs of the birds, how they quiver on the balmy breeze, and fill the air with melody! Blackbirds and thrustles, goldfinches and robins—they might all have been retained for the occasion, from the way in which they exert themselves. We hope they will not be hoarse to-morrow, though we are not without doubts upon the subject. But all the noise of their song is not sufficient to prevent us from hearing the cawing of a distant colony of rooks, the low notes of the cushat dove in yonder wood, or

the clear note of the cuckoo as he rises towards the bright sky.

But while we have been making our survey, the preparations have been completed, the people have been gathering, and the fun has begun. There may be from three to five hundred people on the ground. There are old men in clean smock-frocks, leaning upon their walking-sticks; young men in their Sunday best, talking to their sweethearts; lads and girls as full of life and freshness as the birds above or the flowers beneath; and a large residuum of blackguardism from the nearest city and the various villages around. The games are largely and heartily entered into. The most popular, at present, is that carried on by the morris dancers. Tricked out in their best finery, and jingling their merry bells, they move up and down the mazes of their fantastic dance, while the open-mouthed rustics look on with unfeigned wonder and delight. Another popular pastime seems to be that of jumping and racing in sacks. The game is too well known to need any description, and we need only say, that the people of Riversdale enjoyed it as fully, and looked quite as sensible while engaged in it, as would the people of any other place. Yonder are a few young men quoit-playing, but not many are attracted by that, and those who are, are very foolishly betting quarts of cider, or beer, upon the issues of the game. And, of course, there is the May-pole—well greased, and with a leg of mutton fastened to the top, there it stands. A knot of admiring youngsters have gathered round it, eyeing the prize with eager desires. Poor fellows! They never taste any animal food save bacon, and are very thankful to get that. Who will be the first to venture? Here comes Shiny Dick, and, greeted with a cheer from the other lads, clenches his teeth and essays to mount.



But we can see he will never get to the top ; and so it proves, for after climbing half a dozen yards by the most desperate efforts, he suddenly looses his hold and comes down upon his back, amid the ringing laughter of the crowd. Never mind, Shiny ! we wish you better success in some better thing. But what is the meaning of all that laughter yonder ? Let us go and see. A number of lads are standing in a waggon, which is being drawn to and fro under the trees by Farmer Sloven's old "Dobbin." Their hands are firmly tied behind them. Hanging from the trees above their heads are a number of buns that have been well dipped in treacle, and as the lads pass they attempt to catch them with their teeth. Now and then a lucky wight is fortunate enough to get hold of a bun, but generally the only thing gained is to get the face well smeared with treacle. A more ludicrous spectacle than that presented by these lads, when their game is over, can scarcely be imagined.

But as the day wears on very different scenes are witnessed. Of course, a wake would be nothing without liquors, and as they cannot well be supplied without a public-house, there, sure enough, is one. It bears a very significant name, "The Jolly Tipplers," and is thronged both within and without. The tipplers are very jolly just now, whatever they may be in a while ; indeed, we are afraid they are almost *too* jolly, for it is impossible to be very jolly to-day without being very miserable to-morrow. But though "The Jolly Tipplers" is quite capable of doing a good trade, and most unmistakably is doing a good trade, it is not equal to the present demand. And, in order to make up the deficiency, Farmer Appletree has sent a cask of cider, and Farmer Peartree a cask of perry, both of which are to be given away—and are given away accordingly. Judging from the

quantities the people drink they must, one would think, have drank nothing since the last wake, and be now making up for it by satisfying the accumulated thirst of a whole year in one day. As may be expected, the effect of this is soon visible, even upon old soakers, much more upon the young, and a general demoralisation seems to set in.

The first evidence we see of it is the way in which the men are playing the game of "back-sword." This game is so well described for the general reader in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*,\* and so well known in the south-west and some of the midland counties, as to need no description here. All day, so far, it has been skilfully and carefully played, but now the men lay about each other with their weapons as though they were beside themselves, and really anxious to inflict serious bodily harm, which one of them very soon does; bringing his stick round the head of his antagonist with a wild flourish, he suddenly strikes him full in the eye, thereby blinding him for life. The wounded man hobbles off the stage, and the joviality of the company is all gone, until it is restored by more "drink."

So soon as the excitement caused by this mishap has passed away, we wander to another part of the ground, where our attention is soon arrested by a noisy group. In the middle of the group stands a woman about forty years of age. She has a halter round her neck, one end of which is held by a rough, half-drunken brute—her husband. She has been his wife for fifteen years, and is the mother of his seven children. All through those years she has borne her evil lot as best she could, enduring blows, neglect, and ill-treatment of all kinds.

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\* Chapter "The Veast," p. 34.

But an oft-repeated threat is now being put into execution, and she is being sold to the highest bidder. The drunken auctioneer extols her good qualities in language that is sometimes indecent, and always more forceful than elegant. But the bidding goes on slowly. At length, however, a dirty-looking fellow, with a dog at his heels not half so degraded-looking as himself, bids half-a-crown; and amid brutal laughter and coarse jesting the sale proceeds, until the woman is "knocked down," for half-a-sovereign, to "Bandy-legged Joe," a travelling tinker, and a widower with five children. The fun is somewhat spoiled, nevertheless, by the unexpected sequel. For after the woman had had some conversation with her new master, she liked him so little that she left him, and returned to her former husband, pithily remarking, "I would rather put up with the divil I know than the divil I don't." \*

Hardly have we recovered the shock of this degrading scene when our attention is arrested by loud shouting, proceeding from half a dozen different places. And upon examination we find it comes from the backers and admirers of as many fights, which are being carried on with great determination and bull-dog courage. The wake at Riversdale is noted for its battles. Any quarrel that may happen to take place throughout the year for many miles around is allowed to remain over until the wake, when the persons interested meet and fight it out. And then it is a noted fighting time for those gentlemen who practise the noble art of self-

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\* We very well remember a woman being sold one afternoon in the market-place of ———, in the manner above stated, for half-a-crown. And a precisely similar case to the above is reported as having taken place in Stockport so late as the present year.—Vide *Manchester City News*, April 14, 1877.

defence. The "Goosegreen Strapper" comes here to take it out of the "Duckland Dumpling," and "Big George" of Muddleton settles his accounts with the "Riversdale Bantam." Of course heavy bets are made, many quarrels ensue, and a large number of amateur combats are got up without previous arrangement.

And *such* fighting—downright savage, brutal hammering of each other, which often ends in broken bones. And kicking too—for, incredible as it may seem, some of the roughs come to the wake with the toes of their boots well furnished with pointed irons, which they use about each other's legs, while each man firmly holds his opponent by the shoulders.

So the day wears on amid scenes of riot and sin until the shades of the evening mercifully veil the iniquities committed by drunken passion and unbridled lust.

But half the horrors of the Riversdale wake have not yet been told. Let these suffice, however. The reader may imagine for himself, if he will, many more—the drinking all day, the dance in the evening, the first act of drunkenness on the part of many a young man, the fall of many a young woman, the first lesson in evil taken by the young and comparatively pure of both sexes, and many other nameless horrors that must inevitably accompany such a Bacchanalian festival.

The evils of the wake were admitted by all the respectable people, but they felt them to be of too long standing, and too deeply rooted to be eradicated, and nobody thought of doing more than heaving a passing sigh over that which they felt they could not prevent. But at length the Methodists came to the rescue. The work of God had been prospering among them, and many were in the fresh glow of their first love to Christ. Prominent among these was a young

tradesman, a man of good intelligence and great energy of character. The first class-meeting ever held in Riversdale met in his house, and he was ready for every good word and work. Another was a large and influential farmer, who was then, and still continues to be, a faithful and zealous servant of the Master. These two brethren, greatly stimulated and assisted by an "elect lady,"\* and backed up by every member of their little society, determined to do their utmost to put down the wake. It was a bold attempt. But they regarded themselves as the servants of Jesus, and the sworn enemies of the devil and all his works. And here, verily, in the very midst of them, he had his seat. In the name of the Lord they resolved to attack him.

They held their first formal consultation about two months before the wake was due, in the year 1846, and after earnest prayer and careful deliberation, resolved to get up a counter attraction in the shape of a tea-meeting. They expected much opposition, and were determined to fight it out manfully. The parish was well canvassed beforehand ; the evils of the time were forcibly pointed out, and help earnestly requested on behalf of those who were striving to put them down. When the great day came a large marquee was erected in the very field in which the wake was held, tickets of admission were given to all the poor of the parish, and under it the Methodists and their friends assembled for tea. All kinds of fun was made of them, and they served as the butt of many a coarse jest ; but a large number of the former wake-goers came to the tea-meeting, and, as

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\* Vide pp. 135-137, and *Methodist Magazine* (abridged edition), November, 1855, pp. 561-566.

Farmer Standup said at the close of the day, "the Methodists have took the shine out o' these wake folk to-day at any rate." So they had. After tea the circuit minister preached from the text, "God is love," and his words were not allowed to fall to the ground. The following year a feeble effort was made to keep the wake alive, if not to restore its past glories, but it was of no avail. Only two or three broken-down stalls were seen, and though old Farmer Crusty *would* send a barrel of cider to be given away, scarcely anybody came to drink it; and from that time the Riversdale wake became a thing of the past. So may the enemies of sobriety, good order, and true religion ever perish!

But, in order that we may illustrate the wonderful ways of God, and make our history more complete, let us close this sketch by a brief account of the introduction of Methodism into Riversdale. The instrument in the good work was the "elect lady" already referred to. Her own spiritual enlightenment was due, under Divine grace, to Methodism, and came about in a manner that illustrates the manifold methods of working resorted to by the unfettered Spirit of the Most High.

She was born "across the water," but when quite young came to reside with her brother at the "great house" of Riversdale. Her father was an English gentleman, "all of the olden time," with a head as free from all modern ideas of culture and refinement as it was from any notion that his life would be made happier or nobler by aping the classes of society that were above him. So he lived his life as was the custom of his rank and time, possessing the virtues and faults alike of that class of society to which he belonged. Among the former, however, you could not reckon reverence or love for things sacred. To religion, in the real sense of the



word, he was altogether a stranger. First in his affections stood his wife and children, but whether the second place was to be given to his horse and dog, or to the Church and King we cannot decide, though we are disposed, on the whole, to give the preference to the latter. The Church, however, had unhappily no inner or spiritual meaning for him, and he did not always pay the greatest respect even to its outward forms. And like father like daughter. She was taught frugality, honesty, hospitality, and a kind of off-handed charity. And though these things are by no means to be depreciated, they fall far short of New Testament requirements and privileges, and leave the soul entirely unsatisfied in the presence of the great mysteries of life and death, and utterly unprepared to meet the great problems of a future existence. So this young lady discovered; for soon after her removal to Riversdale she was led to study, with prayer and care, the sacred Scriptures. As she read on day by day she saw that those who would approve themselves before the Most High must have other and deeper qualifications than mere worldly virtues; but what they were, and where and how to obtain them, she knew not. In every church of the neighbourhood, both in country and city, she sought for one who would point her, as Evangelist did Christian, to the way of peace. She sought in vain, however, and at length went, almost in despair, to the Methodist chapel in the adjacent city. There, to her great joy, she found the guidance needed, and soon obtained peace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

She now desired to spread the light that had been so welcome to her own spirit, and at once began to labour for the benefit of the villagers around her home. A Sunday-school was commenced by her in her own house,



a room was taken for preaching services, many were gathered to Christ, and in the course of a few years a chapel was erected, in which the truths of Christianity have now been regularly proclaimed for nearly forty years. The year after the chapel was opened the wake was put down. The influence of this Christian lady was felt in many other ways likewise, and though she herself has long since left the scene of her earthly labours, her bright example is not forgotten, and her works still follow her. When she died she bequeathed upwards of £3,000 to the funds of Methodism, and the legacy of a saintly memory to the Church of God.

The annals of Methodism in Riversdale are rich in many a story of devotion and goodness, but, for the present at least, we must leave them untold, and content ourselves with having narrated how the Methodists stopped the wake.

## CHAPTER XV.

### Conclusion.

"If he *believes*, let him stand up and say."—WILSON.

"Speaking the truth in love."—THE APOSTLE PAUL.

WE do not close our sketches for want of material with which to write more. Facts and incidents accumulate in our hands, some of which may, perhaps, appear at some future time. Those already given may not be the best that could have been given, but they have been selected from such material as the writer happened to possess, or to have access to, and with the best judgment he could use. Undoubtedly, many cases might have been found where more startling facts and more brilliant successes might have been recorded, but those given can claim to be very moderate instances of the necessity for, and good effect of, Methodism in the villages of our land; the conclusions we draw from them will therefore not only have the merit of trustworthiness, but be free from all exaggeration.

In looking at what has already been accomplished in connection with village Methodism, it is impossible to overlook the fact that glorious results attended the labours of our predecessors in this work, and the first question we are compelled to ask is, "How did they achieve them?" And the answer is, we think, very simple—viz., By unparalleled devotion, indomitable courage,

quenchless zeal, a holy and restless ambition to carry the Gospel everywhere, and a passionate love to the souls of men, which sent them into every nook of the land seeking in order that they might save the lost. And above and beyond this—or, ought we not rather to say, *with* this?—they had the rich and constant blessing of God.

“But,” says an objector, “the case is widely different now. They had the country to themselves, but their ‘zeal provoked very many,’ and district churches have been erected in destitute localities; clergymen who are quite alive to the interests of the Church are numerous; visiting societies and organised work abound; some Nonconformist Churches have their village evangelisation schemes, and we cannot expect to be as successful in this work as our fathers were.” No doubt this is true; and it would be very unfair not to give it due weight in estimating our present position. But so long as we consider it needful to do the work of winning souls in the villages of England, such considerations as these ought to show us that our zeal should not be less, but greater, than that of our fathers, if we would emulate their successes; for, if we would overcome the same difficulties they contended with, and others of a modern growth, to which they were strangers, we surely shall need devotion at least equal to that which sustained them. Not that we regard the fact that other Evangelical Churches are working side by side with us as a difficulty; we rather regard it as a blessing and a help. But if great zeal was needed when the field was all our own, how much more must be needed when there are other reapers in it, if we are to come home with rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us? Hence the fact and the lesson it teaches, viz., our fathers won their successes by arduous toil, and so only may we, come home with double force to-day. On every

chapel they raised, and on every trophy they won from Satan, may be inscribed in letters of light the words, "Soli Deo Gloria," but surely as distinctly, though less prominently, are written such words as these: "As they conquered, so may ye." Undoubtedly, the best way to honour our ancestors is to carry on their work, and the best way to do that is to avoid their errors, to copy all that was noble, heroic, and wise in their actions, and to follow out those lines of work which led them to such blessed success. As Methodists, we are very properly proud of the devotion, piety, and successful labours of the earlier Methodists; but to attempt to live on their laurels will be a sorry business, and to make a veneration for their devotion a cover for our indifference will be a thing unworthy those descended from such worthy sires.

Krilof, the Russian fabulist, tells us that, once upon a time, a peasant was driving a number of geese to a fair. He carried a long rod in his hand, with which he often quickened their pace, as he did not wish to be late. The geese were very indignant at this, and loudly complained to the passers-by. "See how this idiot uses us; he does not reflect that we are the descendants of those very geese who saved Rome, and that our ancestors had immortal honours paid them." "But," said a passer-by, "what have *you* done?" "O, our ancestors—" "Yes, I know all about that; your ancestors did good work, and were honoured for it. Let them rest in peace. But you have done nothing that entitles you to consideration; you are only fit to be sold and roasted!"

We must confess that we are sometimes a little afraid lest some Methodists should act the part of Krilof's geese. This is not an age when things are tolerated because they are related to a noble past. By all means let us recount the deeds of the past, and venerate those who toiled so

nobly ; but let it be as the knights of old sang the songs that told of the chivalry of their fathers—viz., to stimulate them to something nobler still. When William the Conqueror began the battle of Hastings, one of his minstrels went before the warriors chanting the Song of Roland. But he who chanted the mighty deeds of old did it in order to brace his spirit to mightier deeds in the present. He led the van, inspired his companions, struck the first blow, and was the first to find a hero's grave. Like the Spartans of old, we shall find it wise to sing of the bravery and success of the valiant dead, but doubly wise to close with the refrain :—

“ Hereafter, at our country's call,  
We promise to excel them all.”

But the only way to equal, much less excel them, will be to live as they lived, pray as they prayed, toil as they toiled, and endure as they endured. Nothing short of that will suffice. Stirring and eloquent speeches delivered at Conferences, home missionary meetings, and other gatherings, warm our hearts towards the villagers, and lead us to form ardent resolves to deliver them from the ignorance, superstition, and sin in which many of them live and die, and, so far, they serve a good purpose. But unless these eloquent speeches and ardent resolutions lead us to *work* the villages, year in, year out, when rain, wind, darkness, and small congregations depress us ; when there is no audience to cheer, and none save God looking on to applaud our faithful labours, they are worse than useless. A safety valve is very necessary, but it is a pity when all the steam escapes through it, and there is none left to drive the engine. Our fathers won their successes by labouring *in* the villages, not by talking *about* them ; and so have the destinies decreed it shall be with their sons.

And although it is fair, on one side, to say that we have difficulties that were unknown in former days, it is equally fair to say, on the other, that we have advantages that were not then possessed.

In former times, our local brethren had almost universally to walk to their appointments ; but now, in the majority of cases, they are, happily, able to ride, in consequence of which the journey is made in less time and with less fatigue. Would it not be well to employ the time and strength thus gained in visiting the members, distributing tracts, giving a kindly invitation to the idlers or unconcerned to attend the services, and holding a short meeting for prayer and inquirers after the evening service? Very little could be done in any one Sunday, perhaps, but a little done *every* Sunday would tell in a year.

And as circuits are much smaller now than formerly, would it not be possible to give the villages a little more pastoral attention? We are quite aware that the claims upon the time of our ministers are incessant. How much there is to be done in connection with the town societies and in the "study," and how very hard it is to tear oneself away from these pressing duties, and start off at two o'clock in the afternoon, in order to have time to "visit" before service in some distant village, we know full well. But, if the effort could be made, should we not be amply repaid? Many brethren of our acquaintance do this, and they are successful in gaining congregations in the villages of their circuits, and their names are "as ointment poured forth." And if it be not done, how is it possible for us to extend, or even to keep, what we have? We rejoice very heartily at the appointment of evangelists for the country districts, believing as we do that it will supplement the efforts of ordinary workers, be the means of accomplishing a blessed work, and lead to glorious results.

But does it do away with the need of pastoral oversight? Or will it in any way make up for the absence of that? We think not. Those who have been made overseers of the flock of God must oversee them, or, despite patent fences, and much barking on the part of the dogs, the sheep will wander.

And some village Methodists themselves need more life, more intelligent attachment to their own denomination, and more zeal in the service of God than they possess. Many both do and endure bravely. Some, through long lives, bear petty persecutions and small annoyances with unyielding spirits, and cling to Christ and to us with noble pertinacity, while some yield easily to various adverse influences. But all who know the condition of the villages will be surprised, not that so many turn aside from us, but that so many remain faithful to us.

And the majority of our well-to-do village Methodists are willing to give and to labour in support of their convictions. Their horses and their homes are at the service of the preachers, so that hours that would otherwise be consumed in exhausting walks may be better employed, and the end of the journey made agreeable and refreshing. But there are village Methodists who might improve in this respect. A friend of the writer's walked five miles one afternoon not long since, then made some pastoral calls, preached, and met a class, and started to walk home. A black sky, drenching rain, and dirty lanes offered no very inviting prospect. Mr. Hardman—society steward and farmer—took our friend into the lane, and, bidding him good-night, exclaimed, "Eh! raly, Mr. Longwalker, raly now, it a'nt fit to turn a dog out, but 'owever, it a'nt worth while for two to get wet. Good night, and God bless 'ee." Mr. Hardman had three good horses in his stable.



And are there not others who might contribute to a more successful working of village Methodism? We think our brethren in the towns might help it in many ways. There is scarcely a village where Methodism has been established for any length of time that has not sent, at least half a dozen boys into the towns who have done well in them. And if these "boys" from the villages would remember their village homes, they might do a great deal to strengthen Methodism in them. We know a case where the village chapel is poor and dilapidated, and three gentlemen who attended it as lads, and received their first good within its walls, have furnished the funds for the erection of a new one. Why should not such cases occur more frequently? A few days since the writer saw a letter from a young man in Australia to his former superintendent in the Methodist Sunday-school of a country village. Among other things he said: "You have a good chapel, but the old wall in front spoils the appearance of it; please accept the enclosed £5 towards building a new one." And if this much could not be done, a few shillings might be sent to the old place occasionally to relieve the necessities of "poor saints;" some judicious friend on the spot would be only too thankful to distribute it, and what a blessing it would be! And that leads us to ask if it is not possible in some way to establish a "poor fund" for the villages? The Lord's Supper is only administered in them at intervals, and the collection at that and the quarterly love-feast amounts to the merest trifle. Where the money is most needed it often happens that the amount contributed is the smallest. And thus it comes to pass that the Methodist poor cannot be relieved by Methodists; and as in many instances they are refused help from other quarters because they are Methodists, a great

temptation is offered them to leave their own fold. Is it not possible in some way to distribute the poor-money more widely and more efficiently? Some rich societies have more than they can use, and would contribute much more than they do if it were shown to be needful. We confess ourselves unable to open a practical way out of the difficulty, but are sure the subject is worth serious consideration.

And is it not possible for the Methodists of the towns to help their brethren in the villages by bringing some influence to bear upon those landowners who refuse to sell land for the building of Methodist chapels? Many town Methodists appear to think such landowners do not exist, and that because there is usually no difficulty in securing land on which to erect an elegant chapel in the vicinity of a town, therefore it must be quite as easy to obtain land on which to build a small village chapel. But it will generally be found that such men have never had any practical knowledge of village life; always having lived in the town, they do not know the difficulties of their poorer brethren. That being the case, however, they should believe those who do know, and act accordingly. Village Methodists have *grievous* complaints to make in reference to some landowners. While writing this paper, two cases in point have come under our notice. In the first, the bigotry of the landowner not only denied the land on which to build a chapel, but caused the Methodists to be turned out of the room they occupied, and so drove them from the village. And in the second case they are compelled to worship at great inconvenience in a small cottage, though the funds for the erection of a chapel would be at once forthcoming if land could be procured. It is only a few weeks since the Baptists were expelled from an adjacent village in the same way.

Altogether, *irrespective of party considerations*, we are quite convinced that a moderate but determined action in this matter would influence public opinion and legislation in such a manner as to produce a favourable change. But it must be done by the Methodists of the towns, if done at all. Perhaps it is not too much to say that not one-fifth of the village Methodists can vote for Members of Parliament, and that at least two-thirds of those are under the direction of other people. Village Methodists look to their more favoured brethren in the towns to help them, and we hope they will remember this at the polling-booth, and anywhere else where it will be of service to do so.

And, we should like to ask respectfully, has not the time come when all Methodist denominations should look earnestly at the question as to the desirability, or otherwise, of having two, or even more chapels, that represent various branches of the Methodist family in the same village? It appears to us that in such cases we call attention to our divisions, and thereby weaken our influences. Besides which it is quite certain that two small societies will do less good in a village than one large and vigorous one, to say nothing of the fact that the two will cost nearly as much again to work them as the one, and surely, in the present urgent need for Christian effort, any waste of it must be a positive sin. Of course, we only speak of ordinary country villages, where one chapel is manifestly all that is required. But in all such cases, we can, at least, leave the field to that branch of the Methodist family that happens to be in possession, if we are not yet prepared to amalgamate our "causes," when more than one exists. To rush in and build chapels in small villages where Methodism already has a position, we think argues more zeal than knowledge.

“But is the exertion of so much energy in the villages needful, or, to say the least, wise?” “For,” it is said, “Methodism is not needed in the villages now. The clergy of the Established Church are active and devoted; a number of them are evangelical; and, on the whole, the villages are well supplied with the ordinances of religion, and their spiritual needs well cared for.” To *some extent* this is true, and so far as it is true we most gladly acknowledge it. To see so great an improvement in the lives, the doctrines, the mode of teaching them, and the general spirit of the ministers of religion connected with so influential and wealthy a denomination as that of the Church of England, must be cause of rejoicing to every Englishman who loves his Saviour and his country. But we are bound in truth to say that the improvement is neither so great nor so extensive as some people imagine. There are still many wide districts which do not contain one earnest and devoted evangelical minister, and almost numberless parishes that are denied that blessing. And unhappily a large and increasing number of the clergy who are most devoted to their work are more devoted to the puerilities and superstitions of Rome than to Protestant teaching or Scriptural truth. We have been accustomed to hear for some time as a rallying-cry for the villages, “The battle of Protestantism will have to be fought in the villages of England.” As a prophecy the cry is no longer true, for in sober truth and downright reality the battle is being fought now, this very day and hour. And that which plays most strongly into the hands of the foe is the fact that large numbers on our side are not aware that the battle has begun. While the enemy is sapping and mining, and quietly taking—they never storm a place—village after village, we contentedly wait to hear the

firing of cannon, and see the flash of firearms, and not seeing them we say, "All right," whereas it is all wrong. The great difficulty seems to be to make town and city Protestants, especially Methodists, feel the reality and and gravity of the present crisis. Because the Ritualists do not succeed largely in great populations, where they are closely watched, and where public feeling is too strong to allow any resort to those petty persecutions and base methods of obtaining success to which they often *freely* resort in the villages, the Methodists of the town and the city are easy, and say, "O, Ritualism is not doing much harm ; when it comes near we will put it down," What, then, should we think of an army who lay in ease and inactivity while its outposts were cut to pieces, and its outworks destroyed, and discharged its conscience by saying, "When they come near us we'll pepper them" ? When the warning of the sentinels is unheeded, and the outposts are taken, what follows ? And yet we should think our friends in the cities and towns see and hear enough to know that there is danger. Being only a "country parson," we do not know the distance from St. Alban's to City-road, but we imagine it is not very great. And even if it be, there are unhappily many other churches in London where the services are Roman Catholic in almost everything but in name.\*

We have large chapels within easy walking distance of Ritualistic churches in every large town or city. And yet in those churches Protestantism is decried, the Reformation wept over as an awful calamity, Romanism aped, and a priestly confession set up.

And do our good friends in London, Manchester, and other large cities need to be told that if such things go on

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\* See articles "Leaders Towards Rome" in *Christian World* for March and April, 1877.

in such places, the quiet and unprotected villages of the country will be made the homes and strongholds of every superstitious folly. "For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

It is a remarkable fact that a number of those little manuals of devotion, such as *Some Questions on the Church Catechism*,\* and the most objectionable of them are the work of village clergymen. And if such men can find time and energy for contributions towards the Romanising of the country generally, what is likely to be the fate of the villages committed to their care, and where there is hardly a power of any kind to oppose their influences?

Said a good Methodist to the writer a short time since: "We have just got the first instalment of Ritualism come into our district. The living of Fatacres is in the gift of Lord Overall, who is a Ritualist, and he has just presented it to the Rev. Mr. Highcreed. Before he had been in the parish a fortnight he showed us what to expect. The churchwardens were informed that they must wear a dress denoting their official position, and which was variously ornamented with crosses, &c. But the parish is Protestant, and the churchwardens refused, while one of them, and most of the respectable inhabitants, have come to our chapel. As a consequence it is crowded and needs enlargement; but we have no funds, and fear we shall not succeed in raising a sufficient amount. Then, again, we need a better pulpit supply. While the majority of the local preachers are both faithful and efficient, we have a few who are unequal to their work, and if any

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\* *Some Questions, &c.* By Rev. F. A. Gace, M.A., Vicar of Great Barling, Essex. London: J. and C. Mozley. *Steps to the Altar, &c.* By W. E. Scudamore, M.A., Rector of Ditchingham. London: J. Masters and Co.



village magnate happens to be in attendance, one of the 'poorer brethren' is sure to be planned. And then the rector has the education of the parish in his hands; he is a young man, his living is sure, and he can wait. We are afraid that in the long run he must beat us. What are we to do?" This is a sample of many cases, and they need instant sympathy and attention.

The village of Sinfulton (Chapter V.) was first re-deemed from semi-barbarism, and then supplied with evangelical teaching by *the Methodists alone* for nearly a century. Recently, however, the Rev. Blank Puziphus has been made vicar. He is devoted and earnest, but regards dissent and drunkenness as equally sinful, to say the least, and puts his whole force into the noble work of making all his parishioners "Church people." Meeting a little boy in the village street he inquires, "Where do you go? I do not remember seeing you at church." "No," is the answer, "I go to the chapel school." "To chapel! to chapel!" exclaims the vicar, raising his hands and eyes to heaven in the greatest horror. And, as the Methodist lady who is doing her best to serve Methodism in the village says, "Nobody can understand how much such actions affect the people of country villages but those who live in them." And this is only one case out of many such that are constantly taking place.

"But," some one may say, "to object only shows denominational jealousy; so that people go somewhere, what matter where?" We venture to think it *does* matter. Even supposing the services to which they are taken are as good as those they leave, we are bound to confess that we are not prepared to stand idly by while the fruit of a century's toil is swept out of our hands and given to we know not whom. But that is not the case. Those who are taken from us are often taken to hear strange



doctrines and to see strange practices, which we believe to be highly injurious to them. And it is not enough to say that those who take them from us are earnest and sincere. We believe they are. So are the vast majority of the Romish priesthood, and so were a great number of those devoted warriors who defended the Crescent against the Cross, but was that held to be a sufficient reason for allowing them to have their own way? If the High Church party is earnest and sincere in attempting to keep us out of some villages and to turn us out of others, we are equally earnest and sincere in trying to gain the one and hold the other. Sincerity on one side or the other cannot be allowed to settle the matter.

We would not interfere with such villages as have evangelical and earnest ministers, and where the one church is sufficient for the needs of the population, unless we are already established in them. We should be the last to advocate any needless division of the already too divided Church. But after leaving out all such places as do not need us, we have many moral wastes and an increasing number of villages in our land where no pure Gospel is taught, and which offer a noble opportunity of work for Christ. Other workers, both within and without the Established Church, are doing much to keep the light of a pure Gospel burning in the villages, and may they be blessed in their labours! But Methodists have a complete organisation all ready to their hands, and possess other vantage-ground which peculiarly fits them for this work. O that they would make an evangelical crusade upon the villages of England! We are aware that there are many hindrances. Right nobly and earnestly did our late President\* lift up

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\* Rev. Gervase Smith, M.A., President in 1876. *Vide* Speech delivered at Bolton, and quoted by Mr. John Bright in the House of Commons.

his voice against those petty and unworthy persecutions which are the greatest hindrance we have, and village Methodists owe him their heartiest thanks. And other difficulties there are—so numerous that their name is legion, and so great that they are almost insurmountable—but by Divine help and human effort they can be overcome. We hope the attention at present turned to the villages will lead us to find money and men to do the work that needs to be done. Present organisations must be strengthened, struggling circuits assisted, the staff of local preachers encouraged, improved, and increased; and, purged from all denominational ambition and secondary motives, we must set ourselves to the blessed work of saving the villages for *Christ's sake*. If so, we shall go with noble motives to a noble work, and, despite all difficulty, God will bless us, and we shall succeed.

“But we speak, and what we most wanted to say is unsaid; we write, and are conscious that there is only a precarious relation between our real thought and what we have written.” So we feel in reference to this subject. We have spoken out of a full heart, and hoped to have spoken much better. But such as we have been able to say we have said, and, having said it, we commend to the Divine blessing and the warmest sympathies of our readers, VILLAGE METHODISM.

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